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ABSTRACT

Maintaining that only by integrating communications into program planning and policy can Kids Count grantees and other child advocates achieve their goals, this document presents four studies examining the ways in which the media currently frame children's issues, the consequences of those frames, and possibilities for reframing media depictions to support particular policies. Chapter 1, "Public Opinion and the Challenge of Children's Issues" (Susan Bales), identifies the policy issues upon which the research was based, identifies communications challenges in translating children's issues for broad public support, describes the research, and presents suggestions for reframing children's issues. Chapter 2, "Children as a Political Issue--A Review of Current Public Opinion" (Margaret Bostrom), provides an overview of the current standing of children as a political issue, with additional emphasis on education, crime/juvenile justice, poverty, health care, and child care. Chapter 3, "How People Talk about Children's Issues: A Focus Group Report" (Margaret Bostrom), presents key lessons from seven focus groups regarding crafting communications related to children, adolescents, health care, poverty, welfare, crime, rebuilding communities, and taking action. Chapter 4, "The Influence of Local Television News Frames on Attitudes about Childcare" (Franklin D. Gilliam), explores the significance of framing as a news tool to influence viewers, and shows how various news frames influence child care attitudes. Chapter 5, "Language for Reducing Violence" (Axel Aubrun and Joseph E. Grady), recommends a variety of framings and metaphors for communicating messages about violence in American communities. Some chapters contain references. (KB)

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Coalition for America's Children

Who's for Kids and Who's Just Kidding™

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE FOR COMMUNICATING CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Coalition for America's Children with the Benton Foundation

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EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE FOR COMMUNICATING CHILDREN'S ISSUES

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PUBLIC OPINION AND THE CHALLENGE OF CHILDREN'S ISSUES

A year ago the Annie E. Casey Foundation approached the Coalition for America's Children with a communications challenge: to help its Kids Count grantees, and other children's service, advocacy and policy groups, think more strategically about the use of communications to advance their work. The Benton Foundation was asked to design and manage this project, drawing upon its commitment to bring communications research to bear on public interest practice. The result of this collaboration is a body of work that promises to give issues promoters a better understanding of public perceptions of children's issues and to inform their outreach in promoting progressive public policies to meet children's needs. This report is squarely within the Coalition's tradition of sharing communications research across the broad field of children's organizations.

Why is communications important to the Kids Count network? What many social policy practitioners have overlooked in their quests to formulate effective strategies for social change is that communications merits their attention because it is an inextricable part of the agenda-setting function in this country, of the process by which public will rallies around a cause, of the migration of issues from the private realm to the public, of the pressure that is brought to bear upon policymakers, and of determining who wins and who loses in the competition for scarce resources. No organization can approach such issues as community-building, constituency-building, or promoting best practices without taking into account the critical role that mass media has to play in shaping the way Americans think about social issues.

One source of our confusion over communications comes in not recognizing that each new push for public understanding and acceptance happens against a backdrop of long-term media coverage, of perceptions formed over time, of scripts we have learned since childhood to help us make sense of our world, and of folk beliefs we use to interpret new information. In much of this "rage for order", the media is the mediator of meaning—telling us what to think about *(agenda-setting)* and how to think about it by organizing the information in such a way (framing) that it comes to us fully conflated with directives about who is responsible for the social problem in the first place and who gets to fix it *(responsibility)*. It was this particular perspective on communications that drove this research effort.

"No organization can approach such issues as community-building, constituency-building, or promoting best practices without taking into account the critical role that mass media has to play in shaping the way Americans think about social issues."

Effective Language for Communicating Children's Issues is a unique document in many ways. First, it engages the thinking of leading social science researchers in examining the ways that the media currently frames children's issues, the consequences of those frames, and the possibilities for reframing media depictions to better support remedial polices. This continuum—from documenting what children's advocates are up against all the way to suggesting ways to reverse these attitudinal trends—is rarely encompassed in one research framework. Second, the variety of techniques and disciplines represented in these pages—from cognitive linguistics and cultural anthropology to political science and social psychology—are rarely brought to bear holistically on a single social problem. The richness that results—while sometimes difficult to follow and contradictory—is far preferable to the paltry "pitch and place" advice so prevalent in the nonprofit field. Third, this work places communications at the heart of the challenge—it demonstrates that media is an intrinsic part of what must be changed if children are to get the policies and programs they deserve. Only by integrating communications into program planning and policy can children's

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advocates achieve their end. And, finally, this volume attempts to fill in some of the critical information that has gone lacking for too long; such as the excellent synopsis of recent public opinion research on children's issues, a kind of "Cliff's Notes" for the field.

At the same time, there is only so much one little volume of research findings can accomplish. In order to demonstrate the contributions of different kinds of research to the debate, we were forced to focus one technique on one issue, and another on an entirely different issue. It is hoped that the ultimate result will be the advocate's re-education in the art of framing, prompting a re-examination of current practice, a newly informed speculation about the impact of the current practice and a far more creative planning session to identify new frames that better promote children's issues. The intent of this volume is to reframe the perceptions of child policy experts who need communications plans as sophisticated as their other arenas of research and analysis.

A word about the scope of the work and the design of the overall effort. The identification of specific policy issues on which to focus the research was informed by a survey of Kids Count grantees conducted in September 1998 by the Benton Foundation. Half of the states (25) responded. Categories overlap, and responses to open-ended questions were clustered into issues domains. Among the specific findings:

- The top children's issues identified by five or more respondents were: child care (14), health care/health insurance (14), welfare reform implementation (10), early childhood (7) and juvenile justice reform (5).
- Similarly, the top three policy goals for 98-99 were: family supports (16), child health (15), early childhood (10), child care (7), crime prevention and safety (7).
- Early childhood issues were the dominant focus for most Kids Count grantees in their upcoming data books, with 13 devoted to this cluster of issues which included child care, early education, brain development, etc. Other issues highlighted included welfare reform (5) and childhood poverty (2).
- The chief vehicle for communicating Kids Count data is a bad news vs. good news frame (19), followed by my state vs. other states (15), successful program profiles (12), fact plus example (11), kids' policy agendas (11), and case examples/human interest stories about children (10).
- To convey this data, Kids Count projects use providers (14), academics and other experts (13), politicians (12), business leaders (12), kids (11) and parents or ordinary people (11).

When asked to name their biggest communications challenge in translating children's issues for broad public support, the Kids Count grantees were eloquent and sobered by their experiences:

"It's hard to determine what people want to know and if they are understanding the issues."

"Explain to people what needs to be done by when."

"People tend to think of at-risk children and issues affecting children as 'those kids' not 'my kids.' Or problems that 'those children' have. Little sense of connection between all children and our future as a state."

"It is truly difficult for those receiving the message to believe the message because it doesn't relate to them."

"Our biggest communications challenge...is to help people make the connection between their concerns about education, child care, and families and the people they elect and the public policies enacted."

"Translating once-a year concern into sustained action."

"Translating complex, inter-related systems issues into soundbites."

"Communicating the importance of investment in children in the face of other, many big and little issues, e.g. casino gambling, prisons, highways, abortion, Medicaid spending, etc."

What these Kids Count leaders were expressing are classic frustrations with the country's agenda-setting process, the well documented divorce between real world indicators and the public agenda, the distortion of public issues into private concerns by dominant media frames, the lack of public accountability which accompanies this privatization of issues, and the heuristic devices that people use to process information with which they are unfamiliar that often result in rejection.

The research program we undertook, based on this very useful information, sought to do a number of things:

- First, we asked veteran public opinion analyst Margaret Bostrom to cull through the survey literature on a wide array of children's issues over the past five years and to distill into a short primer the most important lessons of past opinion data. We wanted to present our new research against this broader backdrop, as part of an ongoing study into the changing role of children's issues as the legitimate focus for public policy and debate. And, given the range of issues deemed important by the Kids Count grantees, we wanted to be able to signal to them those reports where they might glean additional insight on a specific issue.

- Second, working again with Margaret Bostrom, we designed focus groups to test whether children's issues could be made more salient to the public through different journalistic presentations. Did the "good news vs. bad news" or the "my state vs. other states" frames attract their attention? How did they feel about different kinds-of news, and what did they think about children's policies and programs as a result? Also, what did they know already about children's status and what did they want to know more about? We worked participants through three specific children's issues — child health, child poverty and welfare reform, and violence. In each case, we tried to glean what could be done to raise that specific issue higher on the public agenda, what people were willing to do to solve the problem, how they might raise their voice in support, through what intermediaries, and whom they knew to be active in their communities on children's issues.

- Third, we collected examples of actual media coverage on one specific issue deemed important by the group, child care. Working from research published previously by the Benton Foundation (see "Effective Language for Discussing Early Childhood Education and Policy," Benton Foundation with the Human Services Policy Center, University of Washington, 1998), we identified three frames of news presentation for further study. They were: (1) a child storage/child safety frame, (2) a child development frame, and (3) a business responsibility frame. The actual news presentation was edited and integrated into Dr. Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr.'s media effects experiments at UCLA's Center

for Communications and Community to test whether support for a wide range of social policies were in any way affected by exposure to these news frames.

- Finally, we were able to work from a body of work on violence prevention assembled by the Benton Foundation for the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention. This work had included a metaphorical analysis of the cognitive frames used to "make sense" of violence. Some of these frames were used in the focus groups to probe whether the public could be made more sympathetic to early intervention programs for children, and less punitive to juvenile offenders, if they believed violence could be prevented and understood how this might be accomplished. Following the focus groups, we shared the transcripts with Joseph Grady and Axel Aubrun, and asked them to give this area further study—delineating for advocates those ways of explaining violence that hold little promise for promoting progressive policies for children, and those that hold the greatest potential for reframing the debate.

In the coming months, this body of work will be complemented by another valuable set of papers that begin the difficult task of adapting this research to the practice of Kids Count promotion. In this way, we hope to bridge the distance between theory and practice, recognizing the role that issues promoters must play in taking responsibility for communications strategy. Communications practitioners from both the Kids Count network and the Coalition for America's Children will gather to distill those lessons they feel should guide the translation of child policy and descriptive data.

At the same time, for those of us who have guided this research since its inception, interpretation is irresistible. Let me call the reader's attention to a number of specific research findings that warrant attention and the communications practices they seem to suggest.

First, I have developed a kind of short hand for the Bostrom focus group findings that I find useful in thinking about what we are up against. I offer it as a research soundbite.

- People know kids are in trouble.
- People hold children harmless for their parents situation.
- They react negatively to negative news.
- They cannot connect children's problems to policies or politics.
- They don't know what to do to help kids, how to get started.
- They don't know who is helping kids in their community.

What I glean as useful from the research in beginning to reframe children's issues are the following:

Recast the Kids Count indicators for public understanding.
While good news is more appealing to the public than bad news, children's advocates do not need to recast their descriptive data to tell only good news stories. What they must do is point the way to solutions. What they do need to do is to point out that there are promising programs that are proving that we can reverse these negative trends for children. I would try to package data with examples of "programs that work" both in my state and outside it. I would lean on the investigative instincts of kindly reporters to encourage them to find out why these programs are not more fully funded, more widely available, etc. The message is that these social problems are not intractable, we just aren't putting our public monies where they deserve to be invested.

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Convey meaning, not just numbers.
Policy advocates often find it hard to understand the public's puzzlement over their message. One thing that is clear from the focus groups is that Americans know kids are in trouble. Rather than spending more time educating them about the exact numbers, children's advocates must try to find overarching themes that convey meaning and direct appropriate public response. The millennium theme, like "children are our future," offers a bridge between the data and the values we hold collectively. The Grady/Aubrun paper provides numerous examples of simple ways to convey the lesson that violence is preventable, without saying it in a way that overtly chafes against media-inculcated lessons about crime's randomness and inevitability. The Bostrom focus groups demonstrate, again and again, the centrality of the work ethic to people's evaluation of support for families. These simple themes, rather than being disparaged, should become the mantras with which Kids Count projects communicate to citizens groups.

Incorporate business into the public dissemination of data.
If Gilliam's research holds true over time and across issues, we may be able to explain a role for government simply by breaking out of the "private" frame of responsibility in which only a parent is held accountable for a child. Gilliam's work suggests that merely opening up the discussion to business's role and responsibility simultaneously boosts public support for government's role as well. Ask a business leader to comment on what they are doing, what workplaces can do to improve children's chances, how public-private partnerships are working, etc.

Progressive advocates have, for many years, operated under an "unlikely allies" rule for spokespersons which dictates that you find the person least likely to agree with you and showcase their support. Children's advocates should take note of the impact that the attribution of one quote to a police chief had in reframing that particular issue for public consideration. Again, a public figure and one charged with public issues, the police chief served to both legitimate what were previously deemed ridiculously "soft" answers to kids' problems.

Invest in "how to" and "what to" literature.
Even when the public is able to prioritize an issue, it doesn't know what to do. Especially for children's issues, there is little understanding of the link between the problem and how to support a solution. Children's advocates will have to work very hard to promulgate the news that there are things you can do and ways to work through your existing networks to help kids. To the extent possible, every news event or distribution of information should include a "what citizens can do about it" fact sheet. This plays right into the media's predisposition for "news you can use" and consumer reporting. But make sure the things people can do are not merely volunteer-oriented or asking for time or money; for the most part, people are unwilling to put themselves in these situations. Asking them to raise the issue in their place of worship, to communicate with a public official about the importance of the issue, to document the problem in their neighborhood, to ask their librarian to pull together a study session—these tiny steps can begin to move people beyond their own doors.

Simplify and inter-relate children's issues.
It is interesting to note that few Kids Count grantees mentioned education as an important issue for them, at a time when education has eclipsed crime as the number one

issue in the public's mind. While this should not distract children's policy promoters from doing what they think best benefits children, they should certainly create bridges from those children's issues with little public visibility to those the public has prioritized. In earlier research, the Benton Foundation found that "early education" was a better way to explain the need for quality in child care programs, and that this netted better support for child care as an issue. Similarly, Gilliam finds in his research summarized here that attention to child care issues serves to lower concern for crime. Conversely, unless the public is asking a specific question about children, it is unlikely to pay attention to the answer. While children's experts may have overwhelming proof that welfare has taken a toll on children, this is unlikely to meet with public outcry. Better to realign the findings in terms the public can get behind: is the safety net holding for children? Are we getting all our children off on the right foot for the 21st century? Thinking through the way we present discrete issues, and recasting these as part of broader goals is imperative.

Expect more suggestions for communicating children's issues to emerge from the consultations with Kids Count and Coalition for America's Children leaders in the months to come. Stay tuned, as we work to provide a more solid research base for our practice and to insert a bit of science into the art of advocating for children.

Susan Nall Bales
Director of Children's Programs
and Strategic Communications
Benton Foundation
April 1999

The articles in this publication were written prior to the Columbine High School Shootings which may redirect public attention about children's issues.

CHILDREN AS A POLITICAL ISSUE— A REVIEW OF CURRENT PUBLIC OPINION

By Margaret Bostrom

Note:

The following analysis is intended to serve as a summary of the current foundation of public opinion as it concerns children's issues. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the public opinion on every children's issue nor is it intended to give recommendations on how to shift public opinion. Rather, this is an overview of the current standing of children as a political issue with additional emphasis on five specific issues: (1) education, (2) crime/juvenile justice, (3) poverty, (4) health care, and (5) child care. There is enough existing public opinion information for each of these issue areas, as well as several other issues concerning children, to warrant their own individual summaries, so this paper simply outlines key learning and highlights.

CHILDREN AS A POLITICAL ISSUE - RECENT HISTORY

Over the last decade we have seen a dramatic change in the way in which politicians talk about children. Ten years ago, children were used in political discourse solely as a way to strike an emotional cord with voters. Politicians kissed babies, showed off their own darling children and grandchildren, and made vague references to future generations. Other than education, which was the only government policy voters could connect with children, children were invisible in serious political debate. By 1996, however, candidates for all levels of office were talking about a variety of issues in the context of how they affect children.

In 1991, the National Association for Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions (NACHRI) sponsored the first real study, "Kids' Clout," that analyzed the opportunity for children's issues to impact politics. While it is not clear if the energy had been there all along or if the context had changed, it was clear from that research that there was an opportunity for candidates to use children's issues as a powerful, meaningful message to voters. Even at that time, when candidates were not running on children, a majority of voters (59%) said it was very important for a candidate to have a children's platform.[1] That study clearly demonstrated the potential for children to change the political debate.

In 1992, Bill Clinton's presidential campaign served as the turning point for the politicization of children's issues. Just after President Clinton took office, surveys demonstrated a dramatic shift in people's political expectations for children's issues. Among the President's goals, "reversing declines in children's health care and education" ranked equal in importance with the more media touted goals of deficit reduction and health care reform, and ahead of improving the economy (73% ranked children's issues as a 6 or 7 on a 7 point scale, deficit reduction 74%, health care reform 73%, and economy 65%).[2]

Not only did voters prioritize children, they expected that this president would act on behalf of children. One year before Bill Clinton was elected, 50 percent[3] of voters were not at all confident government would do right by kids most of the time. However, one month after taking the oath of office, this figure dropped to 23 percent. This perception was clearly grounded in President Clinton, with 81 percent confident that he would do right by children.[4]

But the momentum for children continued past 1992. In 1992, 34 percent of voters and 48 percent of Clinton voters, said that children's issues were "extremely" or "very

important" in their vote.[5] By 1996, 53 percent said children's issues were "very important" to their vote. Additionally, 45 percent believed that children were more important in the 1996 election than in prior elections. While children may have been seen as the domain of the family in earlier years, by 1996, voters could clearly see a role for government - 64 percent reported a desire for a large role for government.[6]

Part of the problem has been, and continues to be, that there is little conversation about the ways in which government acts on behalf of children outside of education. When asked whether or not their member of Congress supported or opposed increased spending for children's programs, a majority of voters (58%)[7] have no idea. While this is a daunting testament to the invisibility of children in political debate, it marks a substantial improvement from three years earlier when fully 78 percent[8] did not know the stand of their member of Congress.

Advocates still have not met the challenge outlined by "Kids' Clout" in 1991, which is to educate voters about the programs and policies that impact children. Education continues to be the main children's issue cited by voters, and too frequently the pollsters stop there. For example, when asked what Congress should focus on for children, 33 percent volunteer education, with all other responses in the single digits. However, when given a list of suggestions, the priorities are much more diffuse, with people's top choices being drugs, followed by violence and then education:

- Drugs (40% say it is the first or second biggest problem facing children)
- Violence (38%)
- Education (32%)
- Child abuse and neglect (29%)
- Disintegration of the family unit (23%)
- Learning good values (14%)
- Health care (9%)
- Nutrition (7%)
- Clean and healthy environment (5%)[9]

Of course each of these issues has a distinct set of complexities and questions around the appropriate role for government, but clearly, the electorate is prioritizing children. The remainder of this paper outlines some of the fundamental underpinnings of public opinion on these key issues.

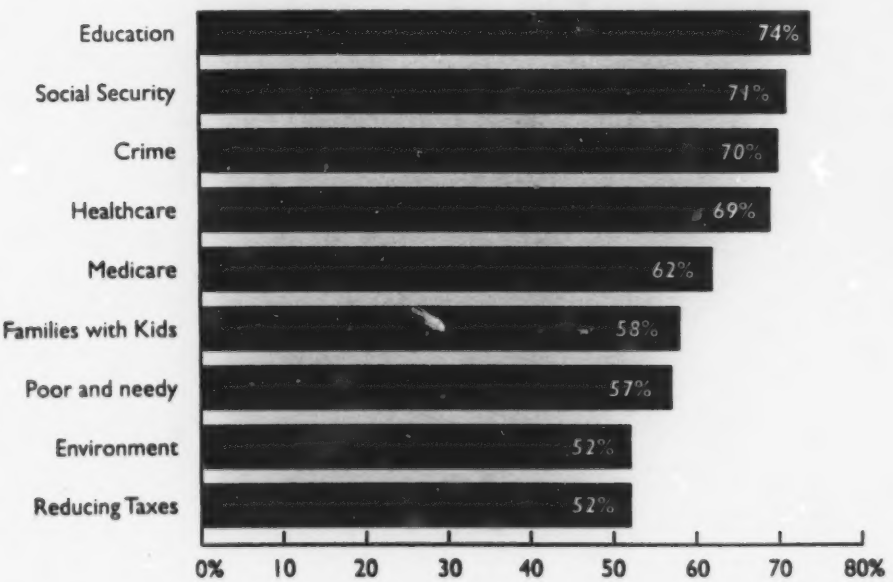
CHILDREN AS A PRIORITY

In early 1999, it *really* is "morning in America" as far as the public is concerned.

Fully 71 percent are satisfied with the way things are going in the United States (US), which is dramatically up from two years ago when satisfaction hovered around 50 percent.[10] A majority of Americans (54%) now believe the nation is generally headed in the right direction (which, other than hitting 55 percent in October 1998, is the highest it has been in over two years).[11] And Gallup's Current Economic Situation Index is at its highest point since the Index was started in 1992.[12] People are now optimistic about their children's future. Three-quarters (74%) of adults believe their children will be better off than they at this point in their lives.[13]

Most current surveys show education as the public's top priority for the country. Since few polls actually ask about children specifically in the mix of issues, an "education" response is one of the few ways people can demonstrate their prioritization of children.[14]

Priorities for Congress
% Top Priority



When specifically included in a list of priorities, children's issues compete with all the more widely discussed issues such as crime and Social Security.

Importance of Issues During Presidential Election[16]		
	Average Score 1-10	Percent Rating "10"
Children's issues like education and health care	8.6	48%
Crime and violence	8.5	48%
Education	8.4	41%
Jobs and the economy	8.3	42%
Health care	8.0	37%
Social Security and Medicare	8.0	36%
Taxes	8.0	43%
Moral values	7.9	36%
Federal budget deficit	7.4	24%
The environment	7.2	29%

Though people prioritize children, and say they are willing to pay additional taxes for those programs they believe in, the patterns of response to questions about taxes and spending is where softness in support begins to emerge.

People prioritize children in their pocketbook as well. Two-thirds (68%) feel strongly enough about the issues facing children that they would spend additional tax dollars to help solve their biggest concern for children, 63 percent would be willing to spend $100 in increased tax dollars.[18]

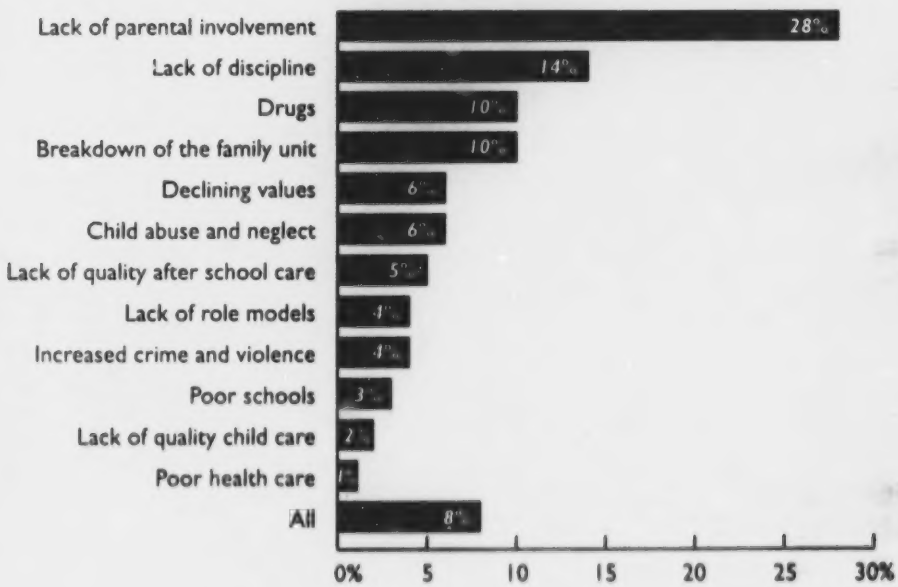
Though people prioritize children's issues and are willing to increase taxes to pay for needed programs, they do not necessarily support children at every turn. When asked which they would prefer, a majority (52%) choose an across-the-board income tax cut for all taxpayers over a targeted tax cut for families with children to use for education and child care (40%).[19]

Americans are divided on priorities for the federal budget surplus. If the surplus were used for domestic spending, people would strongly prefer using those funds for education (45%) and health care (32%) over other issues. However, only 13 percent of Americans prefer using the surplus on government programs, while almost half (49%) would use the budget surplus to cut taxes, and the remainder would pay down the debt (35%). If used for a tax cut, the public is similarly divided between a 10 percent tax cut for everyone (favored by 50%), and "credits for specific things like child care or taking care of disabled parents" (favored by 44%).[20]

Part of the reason people demonstrate some softness in support of children when they look at the federal budget is because they believe the problems facing children are not necessarily problems money can solve. On nearly every issue, people point to parents as both the problem and solution.

In a myriad of ways people indicate that parents are failing their children. When asked the biggest problem facing children in their own communities, people point to a lack of parental involvement.[19]

Biggest Problems Facing Children in Your Community



People see a "lack of parental supervision" as a very serious problem (46%) in their own communities.[20] While they believe there is no going back to the 1950s, people continue to be convinced that dual income families are hurting children. Fully 79 percent agree (49% strongly) that "it may be necessary for mothers to be working because the family needs money, but it would be better if she could stay home and just take care of the house and children."[21]

Whether due to dual income families or other issues, 67 percent simply believe that parents today are doing a worse job of raising their children compared to parents 20 years ago, while only 4 percent think they are doing a better job. Even so, people do not place all the blame at parents' feet. When asked to choose which statement is closer to their opinion, a majority (51%) side with "there are so many bad influences out there that even for parents who do a good job, there is a good chance their children will get into serious trouble." Slightly fewer (44%) side with "even though there are a lot of bad influences these days, parents who do a good job can usually be assured that their children will turn out well."[22]

A second reason people demonstrate softness in support of children when they look at the federal budget is because they continue to not see the ways in which programs and policies impact children.

Parents believe that schools (92%), extended family (87%), friends and neighbors (86%), and community groups like Girl Scouts and sports leagues (82%), are essential to raising children to be good people, but less believe government is essential (44%).[23]

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POVERTY

People's views on poverty are very complex, tapping their core beliefs and assumptions about the American Dream. In our hearts, most Americans still ascribe to the belief that anyone can get ahead in life with hard work; the American Dream is available to anyone who tries hard enough. At the same time, we know that some circumstances can be too difficult to overcome. These two belief systems crash together in the public's opinion of government's role in eliminating poverty.

People hold conflicting views about government's role in eliminating poverty. They are divided between believing "the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all Americans" (51%) and believing "this is not the government's responsibility, each person should take care of themselves" (46%).[24]

On the one hand, 70 percent agree that "the federal government has a responsibility to try to do away with poverty in this country." At the same time, they reject the socialistic implication of income shifting in the statement "it is the responsibility of government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and people with low incomes" (67% disagree, 40% strongly).[25]

Americans firmly believe in individualism. Seventy-eight percent agree (78%, 47% strongly) that "people should take responsibility for their own lives and economic well-being and not expect other people to help." They believe in hard work and responsibility, rejecting the complaint that "hard work offers little guarantee of success" (60% disagree, 38% strongly). It is their work ethic and sense of responsibility that drive their desire for welfare reform, and cause a majority to believe that "people on welfare who are willing to work but can't find a job should be cut off after 5 years" (55%), rather than allow them to "continue to receive benefits" (41%).[26]

They reject a systemic cause for poverty, agreeing that "most people who don't get ahead should not blame the system, they have only themselves to blame" (71% agree, 36% strongly). However, there is a strong compassionate side to the public's belief system as well. When asked to choose between two statements, two-thirds (66%) side with the belief that "most poor people are poor because of circumstances beyond their control" rather than "most poor people are poor because they don't work hard enough."[27]

Importantly, people do not necessarily distance themselves from the poor. They are more likely to believe that they share the same values as poor people (27% say that group generally shares most of their values), rather than rich people (11%). This is different than how they feel about people on welfare, with whom few believe they share values (7%).[28]

According to a Gallup survey in spring 1998, about one-quarter of Americans consider themselves to be have-nots. In a variety of ways, people labeled themselves in this way—designating themselves as a have-not rather than a have, worrying about household finances, not having enough money to pay for basic necessities, perceiving ones' financial situation as worse than their parents, and labeling their financial situation as "poor" or "lower income." Gallup reports that people view the most important factors in determining success in life as hard work and education, while race, gender, inherited money and luck are considered much less important. Even the self-described "have-nots" demonstrate this pattern of response. Even so, Gallup reports that the public expects the government to be involved in helping to improve the situation of the have-nots in society.[29]

CRIME / JUVENILE JUSTICE

People are feeling less worried about crime than they have in decades. Even so, they continue to fear for their own child's safety.

Fears about crime are at their lowest point in years. Only 31% of Americans believe there is more crime in their area than a year ago, while 48% say there is less. This is the best report on this indicator since Gallup began asking the question in 1972. People's perceptions of crime in the US as a whole are more elevated with a majority (52%) stating there is more crime in the US than a year ago, while only 35% say there is less. Even though people perceive crime in the country as worse than in their area, this national perception is also at its best point since Gallup began reporting this question in 1989.[10]

While perceptions about crime are improving, parents continue to fear for their children's safety. A majority (57%) fear for their children's safety "a lot" when they are on the street or at shopping malls (56%). Fewer fear their safety at school (23%) or at friends' homes (20%).[11] Parents are acting on this fear, with 80% saying they have talked with their children about how to handle potentially violent situations, and 71% saying they have talked with their child about what to do if someone brings guns to school.[12]

According to the public, parents' failure to teach their children values is the cause of juvenile violence. They say mothers have more influence than friends or television.

Once again, parents come up as the problem and the solution. From a list of possible causes of violence, a majority of Americans believe "parents not teaching children good values" is the biggest cause (53%). This is followed by drug abuse (27%), leniency toward violent criminals (24%), and television and movie violence (23%). Though people firmly support gun restrictions, few point to the number of guns in circulation as a key cause (14%), and even fewer point to a shortage of jobs (6%).[13]

Parental involvement is also the top solution for combating violence in schools. Of a series of suggested solutions, 27% believe holding "parents accountable for violent acts committed by their children" is the best way to address school violence. This is followed by "provide alternative school settings for violent and disruptive students" (21%), "provide counseling to children at risk of violent behavior" (18%), and "enforce a tough suspension policy for students who commit a violent act" (15%). Only 6 percent would "post armed security guards in schools."[14]

People want parents to take responsibility for their children. Registered voters favor "mandatory time in a juvenile detention facility for any youth who has a gun without parental supervision" (73% favor).[15] Two-thirds of adults (67%) stated that they were "mad" about the Senate's inability to pass legislation to "hold adults criminally responsible for allowing young children to have access to firearms that are used to injure or kill another person."[16]

Most parents believe that mothers still have the most influence with how children think about issues like drugs and violence (76% say that mothers have a lot of influence with how children think about sex, drugs and violence), followed by friends (66%), fathers (63%), and television (60%). Of less influence are brothers and sisters (49%), schools and teachers (47%), churches (35%), the Internet (27%), and magazines (25%).[17]

Events like Jonesboro have parents feeling helpless about protecting their own children.

The school shooting in Jonesboro seared fear into the hearts of parents across the country. Events like this, which are random acts of violence in "average" communities, have brought violence out of the inner cities and right into every home in America. Shockingly, a whopping 71 percent of adults believe it is likely that this kind of shooting could happen in their community with 37 percent believing it is very likely.[38]

People have little desire for leniency when it comes to juvenile violence. However, they do not want juveniles sent to adult prisons.

People think it is more important to be "tough on criminals" (76%) than to protect "the rights of the accused" (17%).[39] However, they also believe the "main purpose of the juvenile court system should be to treat and rehabilitate young offenders" (78%) rather than punish them (12%).[40] Rehabilitate does not mean a slap on the wrist. In a variety of ways, people indicate they want juvenile offenders to face serious consequences for their crimes.

In a survey taken right after Jonesboro, a majority of Americans expressed that juveniles who are 13 years old, accused of committing a violent crime, should be tried in an adult court (58%) and should be punished the same way as adults (54%).[41] This opinion was not biased due to Jonesboro. As early as 1992, 68 percent would try a juvenile accused of a violent crime as an adult. Nearly as many (62%) think a juvenile accused of "selling large amounts of illegal drugs" should be tried as an adult.[42]

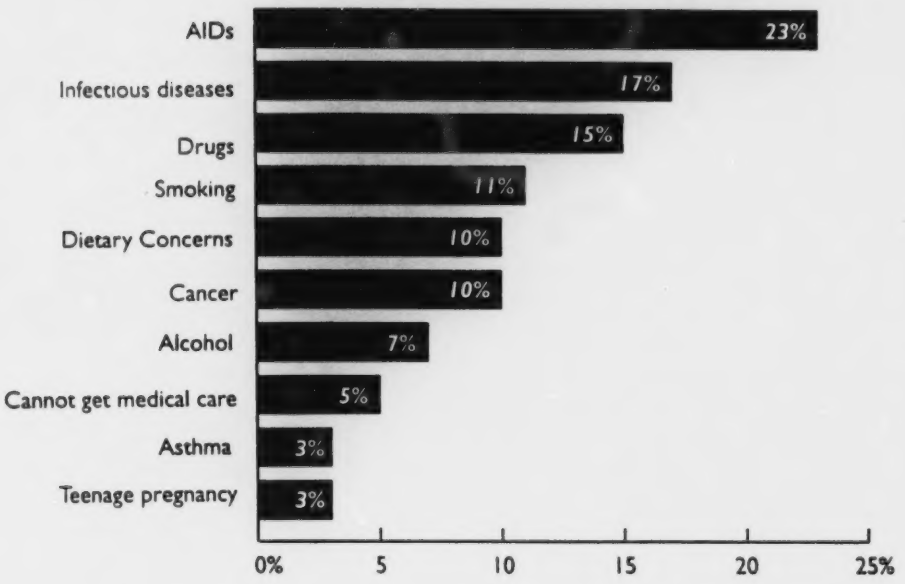
People want juvenile violence taken seriously, and that means enforcing serious consequences. With no other choices given, 42 percent will say that juveniles convicted of a violent crime should be sent to adult prison. With more choices, however, people choose "secure placement" (45%) or "residential placement" (27%) over "adult prison placement" (1%) for first time violent offenders. For a second conviction, the percentage choosing "secure placement" jumps to 70 percent, but "adult prison placement" remains low at just 3 percent. They are more lenient with first time drug users (86% would choose some kind of probation), and even first time sellers of small amounts of drugs (58% would choose some kind of probation). Those found guilty of selling large amounts of drugs, even the first conviction, should be in a secure (44%) or residential placement (29%), but only 1 percent would put them in an adult prison even on a second conviction.[43]

HEALTH CARE

People rarely think of health care as a children's issue. People see health-related issues such as drugs and teenage pregnancy as a values problem, while lack of coverage is seen as a problem for the elderly or working poor adults, not children.

When people think of problems facing children, few think of health care. In fact, even when asked specifically to identify the top two or three most important health problems facing children, 24 percent of the public cannot name one problem, and 48 percent can not name two. The concerns mentioned tend to cluster around diseases such as AIDS (23%), infectious diseases (17%), cancer (10%), and asthma (3%); and behavioral problems such as drugs (15%), smoking (11%), dietary concerns (10%), alcohol (7%), and teenage pregnancy (3%). Only 5 percent cite lack of medical care as an issue.[44]

Most Serious Health Problems for Children



Children's lack of health coverage is largely invisible to the public. When asked who (among a list of specific choices) has the biggest problem getting adequate health care coverage, only 8 percent point to children. People are much more likely to point to unemployed adults (31%) and seniors (28%) over working parents and their children (20%) or children specifically (8%).[45] This perception is largely unchanged since at least 1990, when only 11 percent could point to poor children as the largest group Medicaid serves.[46]

Though few think of access to health care as an issue, 91 percent believe in principle that children should have a right to health insurance.[47] If asked, 83 percent of American will say that it is a major problem that "too many children lack adequate health care coverage."[48]

When people learn coverage for children is a problem, they see the responsibility for helping families obtain health insurance for children with the federal government (27%) followed by employers (22%) and then state government (16%), with all other choices in the single digits.[49]

The anger surrounding health care did not disappear at the end of the health care reform debate, though it has abated somewhat. Instead of wanting government to address rising prices, today people are looking for government to reform HMOs and their coverage practices.

While a majority (52%) believe the "country's health care system needs a great deal of reform," this percentage is far lower than in the heat of the health care reform debate in 1993, when 63 percent felt it needed a great deal of reform.[50] Energy today is focused on HMO regulations. People tend to believe that the "trend away from traditional fee-for-service coverage and toward more managed care" is a bad thing (47%) rather than a good thing (40%).[51]

People are willing to place a variety of requirements on HMOs, including requirements that benefit children, such as requiring them to:

- "allow parents to choose a pediatrician as their child's primary care physician" (89% favor, 54% strongly).
- "provide access to pediatric specialists. . .and hospitals that specialize in treating children" (87% favor, 53% strongly).
- "allow parents of children with special health care needs. . .to choose a pediatric specialist to be their child's primary care physician" (90% favor, 57% strongly).
- "measure and report to the public specifically on the quality of children's health care they provide" (87% favor, 52% strongly).

Even if it increased their family insurance by seven dollars a month, three-quarters favor "requiring HMOs and other insurance companies to provide children with access to pediatricians and pediatric specialists" (73% favor, 32% strongly).[32]

EDUCATION

As outlined earlier, people currently rank education as their biggest priority for the country to address. They are dissatisfied with the schools, but primarily because of what they see and hear on national news. Those who have children in public schools are generally satisfied, and most communities rate their schools highly. Inner city schools are the real focus of people's concerns.

Marginally, people believe that children are receiving a worse education than they did (48% worse, 41% better). Public school parents, however, lean toward believing that children are receiving a better education (49% better, 43% worse).[33]

As has been the trend for years, people give their local public schools better ratings than schools nationally. Overall, 46 percent of adults give their local public schools an "A" or "B" (52% of public school parents). Nationally, only 18 percent of adults and 16 percent of public school parents give an "A" or "B." However, when public school parents actually look at their own child's school, fully 62 percent assign a grade of "A" or "B."[34]

The Association of American University Women (AAUW) study of women's attitudes toward education suggests some key distinctions between who is and who is not satisfied with schools. Overall, a majority of women give their community public schools a grade of "A" or "B" (57%), but they are more critical of public schools in their state (45% say "A" or "B") and nationally (38%). Those who live in big and small cities are less enthusiastic about their local schools (41% and 48% respectively give their local schools an "A" or "B"), while a majority of suburbanites give a "B" or better (57%) and small town and rural areas are even more satisfied (66% and 69% respectively). While they look for major reform nationally (64%), they believe they need only minor changes locally (54%). These patterns strongly suggest that poor public opinion ratings of our nation's schools are driven by people's perceptions of the inner city schools covered in the media, rather than their own personal experiences in their communities.[35]

Clearly, improving inner city schools is a high priority for Americans. Fully 86 percent say that improving the nation's inner city schools is "very important," and 66 percent are willing to pay more taxes to provide the funds to improve these schools.[36]

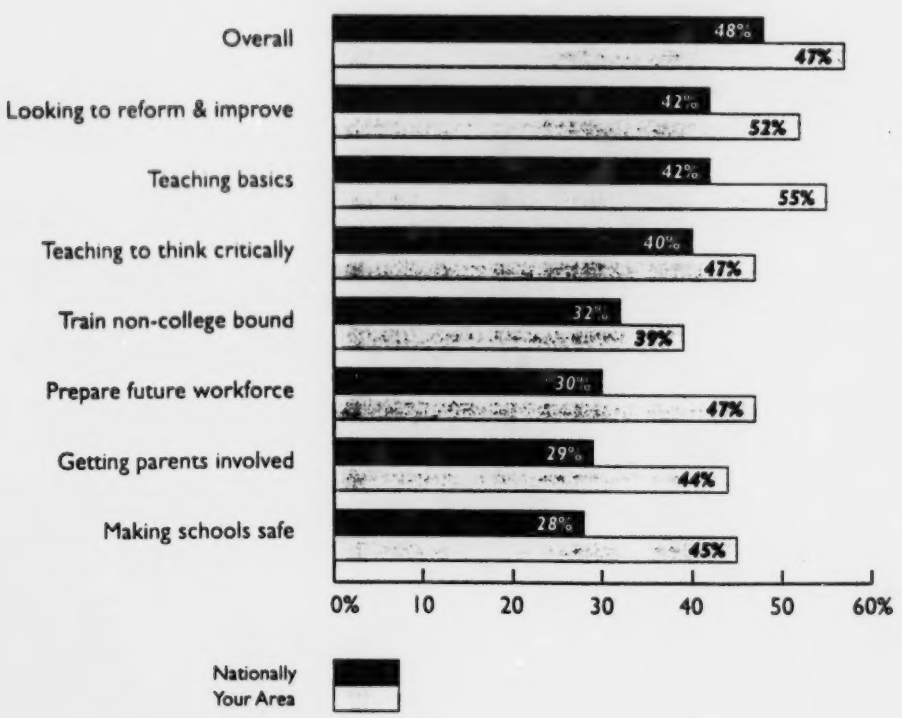
School safety is one of the top concerns people have about our nation's schools, even higher than quality and standards. While schools nationally receive the biggest critiques on safety, people believe even their community schools could use improvement.

School safety is at the top of people's concerns for schools today. The biggest concerns people have revolve around safety issues: violence and school shootings (75% say it is a "very serious concern") and "peer pressure about drinking, drugs, and sex" (65%) are followed by "low academic standards" (59%), "poor quality of teaching" (47%), and "lack of adequate equipment and supplies" (36%).[57]

Elementary school parents, however, have slightly different concerns. From a list of concerns, elementary school parents say they are most concerned about the quality of their child's teachers (43%) and availability of good educational resources (21%). While safety is not the top concern elementary school parents cite (6%), they are concerned about peer pressure (20%).[58]

As the graph below outlines, nationally women give schools passing grades in overall education (48% "A" or "B"), but failing grades in safety and parental involvement (28% and 29% respectively). They rate their own schools higher on every measure, but safety and parental involvement continue to rank lower in their ratings.[59]

% Rating "A" or "B" in Specific Areas



There is a disconnect between what people think schools prioritize and what they want them to prioritize. People believe that schools are giving priority to "preparing students for college" (38%) and "providing vocational skills that prepare students for employment" (28%). However, they most want schools to be "teaching students basic values, such as honesty and respect for others" (37%) and "teaching students how to reason and think well" (36%).[60]

Even more dramatically than with other children's issues, parental involvement consistently emerges as the biggest problem and solution to the issues facing schools.

The problems facing schools, according to Americans, are not necessarily problems money can fix. Only by a slim eight point margin do people believe the quality of schools is related to the amount of money spent (50% say "yes," 42% "no").[61] Of a series of issues facing schools, "too little parental involvement" (21%) tops the list, followed by "lack of discipline in the classroom" (20%). Though voters support increased funds for education, "not enough money being spent on education" is a distant third (13%).[62]

While parental involvement is a higher priority for people than funding, the public strongly supports a variety of funding measures for education: "providing funds to help repair and replace older school buildings" (86% favor, 89% of public school parents), and "providing funds to be used to reduce class size in grades 1, 2, and 3" (80% favor, 88% of public school parents).[63]

Not only does the public want parents to be more involved, parents themselves desire more involvement. Importantly, parent willingness to be involved in their child's education does not stop at bake sales. They are willing to be involved in major decisions facing their child's school.

Universally, parents believe it is extremely important for parents to be involved in school (91%). Their top reason for not being more involved is time and being unavailable during school time (52% chose one of these reasons).[64] Despite the pressures on dual income families today, 74 percent of parents say they are more involved in their children's education than their parents were. Even so, 71 percent wish they could be doing more.[65]

Elementary school parents' biggest frustration with their own schools is their lack of time to be as involved as they would like (39%) followed by communicating with the school (22%). Far fewer are primarily frustrated by their child's lack of interest in school (16%) or feeling the school isn't good enough (5%).[66]

There are a variety of measures that people believe would be effective reforms in increasing parental involvement. Of several communications measures, the public believes that nearly all are "very" or "somewhat effective":

- Public school open houses (89% very/somewhat, 54% very)
- Public school newsletters (87%, 47%)
- Open hearings (85%, 48%)
- Neighborhood discussion groups (81%, 43%)
- Public schools news hotlines (77%, 35%)
- Televised school board meetings (74%, 39%)
- Internet "chat rooms" set up by local schools (63%, 25%)[67]

People have been asking for more parental involvement in public opinion polls for a long time, but what does parental involvement mean? Americans indicate a desire for more parental say in several areas. The general public wants parents to have more say in a variety of substantive areas (public school parents' ratings are higher):

- Allocation of school funds (57% want "more say," 8% "less say")
- Selection and hiring of administrators and principals (55%, 9%)
- Curriculum, that is, the subjects offered (53%, 10%)
- Selection and hiring of teachers (48%, 13%)
- Teacher and administrator salaries (48%, 14%)
- Selection of books and instructional materials (46%, 13%)
- Books placed in school libraries (44%, 14%)[68]

Additionally, a majority of parents would feel comfortable with more substantive tasks than chaperoning field trips:

- Chaperone class trips (91% feel "very" or "somewhat comfortable," 73% "very")
- Help with school events (91%, 62%)
- After school activities (85%, 53%)
- Help evaluate teachers (74%, 37%)
- Decide how to spend your school's funds (73%, 36%)
- Serve on a committee to decide which new teachers to hire (63%, 31%)
- Serve on a committee to propose changing how teachers teach (60%, 27%)
- Help to plan the school curriculum (61%, 25%)[69]

While a majority of parents have chaperoned (57%), and several have helped with school events (44%) and after school activities (38%), less than one fifth have done any of the other activities.

Importantly, teachers do not want parents involved in classroom decisions.

Few teachers approve of parents serving on a committee that would directly impact their classroom, though they are more approving of involvement in budget decisions and even curriculum suggestions:

- Propose changes to classroom teaching methods (15% approve)
- Make hiring decisions on incoming teachers and administrators (25%)
- Evaluate the quality of your school's teachers (26%)
- Suggest materials and topics for the school curriculum (49%)
- Make decisions on spending school funds (54%)
- Propose changes to the lunchroom menu (85%)[70]

Many teachers are highly critical of parents and believe that parents are not doing enough to help with their child's education.

Homework involvement clearly shows the disconnect between what teachers want parents to do, and what they think parents actually do.

Teacher's Assessment of Parental Involvement in Homework		
	What Parents Should Do	What They Think Parents Actually Do
Check the work to make sure it was done correctly	57%	10%
Get involved in helping student do the work	30%	6%
Ask student if work was done and leave it at that	9%	34%
Leave it up to the student	2%	44%

Actually, parents report a significant amount of involvement in, and tension with, their child's homework. Eighty-three percent (83%) of parents say they check to make sure their child has done their homework every day. A majority (52%) help their child with homework every day, and an additional 22 percent help most days.[72] Homework is a source of tension and frustration. Half (50%) say they have had a serious argument over homework with their child in the past year; 34 percent say homework has become a source of struggle and stress with their child; and 22 percent say they have actually done part of their child's homework because it was too difficult or their child was too tired.[73]

Though the partisan debate has attempted to make the federal role in education an issue, people want the federal government front and center.

Voters want active federal government involvement in education. A slim plurality (37%) think the best way to finance public schools is through federal taxes, followed by state taxes (33%) and then local property taxes (21%).[74] Additionally, when asked to respond to this toughly worded question, nearly half landed on the side of a larger federal role:

Which comes closest to your own view:

- The federal government should play a larger role in education by setting national standards and using federal education funds to assure that these standards are maintained in the local schools, 48%
- During the last 30 years in which the federal government has become increasingly involved in education, the quality of education has steadily declined. The federal government should quit interfering and give federal funds directly to states with few if any strings attached and let the local communities determine for themselves how best to educate their children, 29%
- The federal government should take an active role in education by promoting alternative forms of education such as charter schools and vouchers as well as a return to the basics and more discipline in schools. 20%[75]

We should expect the debate over using public funds for private education to escalate. People are increasingly shifting toward favoring using vouchers, tax credits, and other measures to give parents the financial resources to choose any school for their child.

When asked if they "favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense," the public opposes by only a 6 point margin (50% oppose, 44% favor). This is a dramatic change since 1993, when the public opposed by a 74 percent to 24 percent margin. Support for "choice" increases when worded as "a proposal has been made that would allow parents to send their school age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose. For those parents choosing nonpublic schools, the government would pay all or part of the tuition" (51% favor, 56% of public school parents, 74% of nonpublic school parents). This is a reversal from 1996, when 43 percent favored the idea and 54 percent opposed it.

Language around school choice and vouchers can strongly sway the public's opinion, based on whether the public thinks they are helping parents have some involvement in their choice of education, or whether they are determining the use of public funds. For example, 66 percent of adults and 73 percent of public school parents would favor "a tax credit that would allow parents who send their children to private or to church-related schools to recover part of the tuition paid." Additionally, 68 percent of adults, and 74 percent of public school parents favor "allowing parents to build tax-free accounts that they would use to pay tuition and other expenses at private and church-related schools."[76]

However, this slim majority for "school choice" does not hold up when people are given both sides of the debate. When the benefits of giving "all parents the opportunity to send their children to the best schools available to them" is weighed against taking "money out of the public schools during a time when more investment is needed," Americans oppose vouchers by 53 percent (37% strongly) to 44 percent (26% strongly).[77]

The momentum behind choice is fueled by parents who are looking for alternatives in education. A significant percentage of public school parents indicate that they would move their child to a private school if tuition were not an issue. A slim majority (51%) of public school parents would keep their child at the same school, 6 percent would move them to another public school, and 39 percent would move them to a private or church-related school.[78]

Those who have chosen home schooling may begin to have a large influence as well. Fully 32 percent of adults know someone who home schools their children, and only 24 percent think these children are getting a worse education, while 59 percent think their education is "better" (28%) or "the same" (31%) as other children.[79]

CHILD CARE

The public opinion data are mixed on whether or not parents are actually experiencing serious problems in finding acceptable child care. High percentages of the public support expanding funding for child care, but this issue has less intensity than other issues facing children.

There is a mixed assessment of whether or not parents have a problem finding child care. Some studies point to low levels of concern: 30 percent of parents with children under

3 years old felt finding good child care was a problem[80] and only 22 percent of parents of older children said it was "very difficult" to get someone they trust to look after their child after school.[81] However, different studies indicate that 52 percent of parents say that the "absence of acceptable child care reduced your or your partner or spouse's ability to do a job as well as you, or they wanted to do it," and 43 percent say it prevented them from taking the kind of job they wanted. Half of parents (51%) say it was "extremely" or "very difficult" to get affordable child care, and 44 percent say it was "extremely" or "very difficult" to find high quality child care.[82]

Cost of care is an important part of the decision to work. While it was not their primary reason for choosing to stay home, 63 percent of stay at home moms said that "the cost of day care and a paycheck were about the same" was a very or somewhat important reason for them to stay home.[83]

While 70 percent favor (33% strongly) "expanding funding to provide quality optional preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds in our public schools" even if it increased their taxes by $100 a year, and while 65 percent think that is important (29% very important), this issue received the lowest level of support of a series of children's issues tested. It was on par with Internet connected classrooms.[84]

Whether or not people have difficulty finding child care, they do not believe it is an area for governmental intervention. Government can help parents, but it is the parents' responsibility.

When asked who "should be primarily responsible for ensuring that families have access to child care," 60 percent believe it should be up to families, followed by employers (23%) and then government (15%).[85] However, they support government giving working families some help with this responsibility. A majority would favor increasing "federal spending to provide child care assistance to working parents" (63% favor), or giving "tax credits to families that earn less than $60,000 to help pay for child care costs" (71%).[86]

A slim majority of registered voters would like some type of government intervention to help with child care. While a plurality land on the side of reducing the overall tax burden rather than targeting tax credits to child care (41%) "so families have more income to spend on child care," 53 percent would either provide "tax credits to be used for child care" (37%) or "provide child care for families that cannot afford" it (16%).[87]

At this point, there may be more public support for after school care than for child care or early education. People's concern for children's safety drives their desire for supervision after school.

As with child care, few parents report significant problems finding care. In fact, most parents say that they or another parent are looking after their child on the typical afternoon after school (66%).[88]

However, there is strong public support for using public school buildings for after school programs (89% favor, 67% strongly), even if this would cost $1000 per child and increased their own taxes by $10 a year (77% willing, 43% very willing). Critically, out of 14 benefits, all of the top reasons people support after school programs revolve around safety: to "get children off the streets" (46% say it is one of the most important things an after school program can provide), "provide a safe place for children to go" (40%), "provide structured, adult supervision" (40%), and "provide discipline" (39%).[89]

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[1] "State of the Child" funded by NACHRI and the Coalition for America's Children, by Greenberg/Lake and The Tarrance Group, 6200 registered voters (including state oversamples weighted to 1083 nationally), November 1991.

[2] "Mandate for Children" funded by NACHRI and the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and The Tarrance Group, 5274 voters nationally (including state oversamples weighted to reflect the nation), February 1993.

[3] "State of the Child" funded by NACHRI and the Coalition for America's Children, by Greenberg/Lake and The Tarrance Group, 6200 registered voters (including state oversamples weighted to 1083 nationally), November 1991.

[4] "Mandate for Children" funded by NACHRI and the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and The Tarrance Group, 5274 voters nationally (including state oversamples weighted to reflect the nation), February 1993.

[5] "Mandate for Children" funded by NACHRI and the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and The Tarrance Group, 5274 voters nationally (including state oversamples weighted to reflect the nation), February 1993.

[6] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[7] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[8] "Mandate for Children" funded by NACHRI and the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and The Tarrance Group, 5274 voters nationally (including state oversamples weighted to reflect the nation), February 1993.

[9] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[10] Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, 1034 adults nationally, February 1999.

[11] NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 2012 adults nationally, March 1999.

[12] Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, 1009 adults nationally, January 1999. The Current Economic Situation Index = the % rating the economy excellent or good, minus the % rating the economy poor. In January 1999, the Index = 65.

[13] Inc./Gallup Americans at Work Survey, 800 adults nationally who work at least 30 hours per week, February 1998.

[14] Pew Research Center Poll, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1200 adults nationally, January 1999.

[15] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[16] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[17] Battleground 1998 Survey, by The Tarrance Group and Lake Research, 1000 registered voters nationally, December 1997.

[18] Associated Press Poll, 1008 adults nationally, February 1999.

[19] "21st Century Community Learning Centers Survey" sponsored by the Mott Foundation, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 registered voters nationally, August 1989.

[20] Associated Press Poll, 1002 adults nationally, November 1997.

[21] Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.

[22] Gallup/CNN/USA Today survey, 1035 adults nationally, July 1998.

[23] Gallup/C.N.N./USA Today survey, 1035 adults nationally, July 1998.

[24] Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.

[25] Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.

[26] Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.

[27] Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.

[28] Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.

[29] Gallup, 5001 adults nationally, May 1998.

[30] Gallup/CNN/USA Today survey, 1013 adults nationally, October 1998.

[31] Newsweek Poll, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 500 parents of children aged 6-17 years old, nationally, January 1998.

[32] "Talking with Kids About Tough Issues Survey" sponsored by Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 880 parents of children age 6-15 years old, October 1998.

[33] NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 1004 adults nationally, April 1998.

[34] Shell Oil Company Poll, by Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 1998.

[35] Fox News Poll, by Opinion Dynamics, 902 registered voters nationally, June 1998.

[36] NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 1006 adults nationally, July 1998.

[37] "Talking with Kids About Tough Issues Survey" sponsored by Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 880 parents of children age 6-15 years old, October 1998.

[38] NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 1004 adults nationally, April 1998.

[39] Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.

[40] "Public Attitudes Toward Juvenile Crime and Juvenile Justice," funded by Annie E. Casey Foundation, by the University of Michigan, 1992.

[41] CBS News, 994 adults nationally, March 30th to April 1st, 1998.

[42] "Public Attitudes Toward Juvenile Crime and Juvenile Justice," funded by Annie E. Casey Foundation, by the University of Michigan, 1992.

[43] "Public Attitudes Toward Juvenile Crime and Juvenile Justice," funded by Annie E. Casey Foundation, by the University of Michigan, 1992.

[44] Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Poll, by Harvard University and the University of Maryland, 1501 adults nationally, November 1997.

[45] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[46] "Kids' Clout" sponsored by NACHRI, by Penn and Schoen, 1000 adults nationally, June 1990.

[47] Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Poll, by Harvard University and the University of Maryland, 1501 adults nationally, November 1997.

[48] NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 2006 adults nationally, June 1998.

[49] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[50] CNN/Time Poll, by Yankelovich Partners, 517 adults nationally, July 1998.

[51] The Harris Poll, 1011 adults nationally, July 1998.

[52] NACHRI study, by Lake Research, 1000 adults nationally, February 1998.

[53] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[54] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[55] AAUW Survey, by Lake Research, 675 women nationally, June 1998.

[56] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[57] Shell Oil Company Poll, by Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 1998.

[58] Newsweek/Kaplan Education Center Poll, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 407 parents of children in grades K-8 nationally, March 1998.

[59] AAUW Survey, by Lake Research, 675 women nationally, June 1998.

[60] Shell Oil Company Poll, by Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 1998.

[61] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[62] Battleground 1998 Survey, by The Tarrance Group and Lake Research, 1000 likely voters nationally, August 1998.

[63] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[64] PTA survey by Bennett, Petts, and Blumenthal, 800 parents of public school children nationally, December 1998.

[65] Public Agenda, 1220 parents nationally, December 1998.

[66] Newsweek/Kaplan Education Center Poll, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 407 parents of children in grades K-8 nationally, March 1998.

[67] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[68] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[69] Public Agenda, 1220 parents nationally, December 1998.

[70] Public Agenda, 1000 K-12 public school teachers nationally, December 1998.

[71] Public Agenda, 1000 K-12 public school teachers nationally, December 1998.

[72] "Reality Check Parent Survey," Public Agenda, 700 parents of K-12 public school children nationally, October 1997.

[73] Public Agenda, 1220 parents nationally, December 1998.

[74] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[75] American Viewpoint, 1000 registered voters nationally, October 1997.

[76] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[77] NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, by Hart and Teeter Research Companies, 2004 adults nationally, September 1997.

[78] "Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey" sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

[79] Newsweek Survey, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 750 adults nationally, September 1998.

[80] Newsweek Poll, by Princeton Survey Research, February 1997.

[81] Newsweek Poll, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 500 parents of 6-17 year olds nationally, January 1998.

[82] Harris Poll, by Louis Harris and Associates, 1000 adults nationally, asked of the 24% who say they have used child care services within the past 5 years, January 1998.

[83] "Kids and Moms Speak" funded by the Whirlpool Foundation, conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide, 1005 mothers of 6-17 year olds, November 1997.

[84] "Great Expectations" funded by the Coalition for America's Children, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 1994 presidential voters nationally, December 1996.

[85] Harris Poll, by Louis Harris and Associates, 1000 adults nationally, January 1998.

[86] "News Interest Index Poll," funded by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1218 adults nationally, January 1998.

[87] "The Active Center Holds" Survey, funded by the Democratic Leadership Council, by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, 1400 registered voters nationally, July 1998.

[88] Newsweek Poll, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 500 parents of 6-17 year olds nationally, January 1998.

[89] "21st Century Community Learning Centers Survey" sponsored by the Mott Foundation, by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, 800 registered voters nationally, August 1989.

HOW PEOPLE TALK ABOUT CHILDREN'S ISSUES: A FOCUS GROUP REPORT

By Margaret Bostrom

STRATEGIC LESSONS

This report is based on a series of seven focus groups conducted in three cities in fall 1998 (see page 59 for methodology) designed to provide guidance to children's advocates in the crafting of communications that promote children's issues. This section identifies key lessons from a series of focus groups conducted in 1998 regarding children's issues. These lessons can help advocates develop messages that further their agendas.

Lesson 1—Children's issues make for powerful headlines. People need to see successes to believe children's problems can be solved.

Advocates and journalists have an opportunity to focus the public's attention on children's issues. In a mix of headlines pulled from the newspaper, people are more interested in reading stories about children than any other issue. Currently, the public views only negative and sensational stories about children. This causes them to feel overwhelmed by the problems and apathetic about issues that seem too difficult to solve. They need to see some success stories so that they understand that there are solutions for problems that appear so overwhelming.

Lesson 2—Advocates need to watch for the five themes that cross issues affecting children to create effective communications.

Across issues there are a series of common themes that affect how people think about children's issues. These themes are presented not as facts but as perceptions, based on what people told us in these groups. In crafting effective communications, children's advocates need to be sensitive to these crosscutting themes:

Individuals are solely responsible for their situation

Many people can point to how they overcame adversity to be the success they are today. They also point to others' irresponsibility for their own failures. While they are willing to help others overcome adversity, they are convinced that a person's own individual drive is the key criteria for success. Messages should incorporate the ways in which recipients are demonstrating responsibility.

Defining a broad-based solution

Some people readily see the difference that government and business can have in reforming healthcare, and point to the impact of these institutions in helping to overcome poverty. However, they currently have no ability to see beyond individual actions in the area of crime prevention. Messages should not assume that people will understand or support community-based solutions that are not centered around individual action. More work needs to be done to identify the solutions that people will understand and support in reducing crime.

One person cannot make a difference

Though some people firmly believe in the power of an individual to be responsible for his/her own situation, they are also resigned to the belief that they are unable to make a difference in the world. This belief extends beyond cynicism, to a shoulder-shrugging, "what-can-you-do?" attitude. Examples of individuals who have made a difference, even in small ways, could help to empower people to action. Even more importantly, people need to start seeing the successes, rather than just the failures. This demonstrates that there is hope for improving bleak situations.

The worthy v. the unworthy

While some people want to be generous to those in need, they believe many who reap the benefits of societal generosity are the undeserving—the ones scamming the system. While part of this is an expression of racism, part is based on examples of people they have seen (or heard about) who have abused help. Messages need to incorporate the ways in which recipients are demonstrating responsibility, thereby demonstrating their worthiness.

All problems can be traced to working women

When women were at home, there was little crime because they watched the neighborhoods and taught children to act with respect—or so people believe. Since they had relationships with neighbors, communities were more tightly knit. The plight of the working poor is partly due to the greed and standards of dual income families, but also due to the low wages that require women to work to support their families, people say. We will never have the 1950s lifestyle again, because women need to work today. Examples of tightly knit communities can help to demonstrate that, even with dual income families, communities can still come together for youth. People will not feel comfortable as mentors for their community's youth until they have established the relationships that make them feel a part of a village.

Lesson 3—A broad dialogue about healthcare for all children is more powerful than a limited dialogue about poor children.

Focus group participants quickly take a discussion about healthcare to the solution of universal access because they are experiencing their own problems with affordability and coverage. It is all about "me and my HMO." They feel genuine energy and anger, and call for government to get involved in the solution. However, when the healthcare conversation is shifted to a discussion about who is not covered by insurance, participants soon start to blame parents who do not have the information they need or the energy to get the care that exists for their children. To keep strong support for universal access to healthcare for children, the examples of the children in need have to be middle America examples such as recently unemployed, divorced parents, part-time employees, or employees of small companies that do not offer insurance.

Lesson 4—In addressing welfare reform, a "safety net for children" cannot sound as though the parents are benefiting.

Some people believe that welfare reform is in the best long-term interests of the child, even if that child may have to suffer in the short-term. By learning the values of responsibility and hard work, the child will have a much better future. Without those

values, the child will continue the cycle of welfare into the next generation. People want to protect children by offering day care or after school programs, by continuing health insurance, and even continuing dollar subsidies, as long as they see the parents moving off welfare and toward work.

Lesson 5—People believe crime cannot be prevented, but it can be reduced. Metaphors concerning the impact of a community on crime help people to understand the influence of "place." This is the area in which people are least likely to see solutions beyond individual-based solutions.

In developing communications about the ability of communities to impact crime, it is important to refer to those efforts as "crime reduction" efforts rather than "crime prevention." "Prevention" sounds like "elimination" to many, and they do not believe crime will ever go away. Police officers are very effective spokespeople.

People believe the solutions to crime are based with the individual and the family—teaching better values and raising children right. They see community rebuilding as fantasy, unless they have heard of actual successful efforts to rebuild a particular community. Even then, they point to an individual within a community as the key influence. Additional research in this area should work to uncover the broad-based solutions people would find compelling.

A metaphor referring to the ability of a community to affect crime helps people to understand that place matters. Two metaphors are worth further investigation to determine their effectiveness: (1) crime is like an illness or disease (if the body is weak and no efforts are taken to prevent illness, a person will get sick); and (2) a community is like a garden (if it is left uncared for and untended, weeds will invade).

Lesson 6—It is difficult to motivate people to action. They are willing to act only in their own community and only if they see a need. Parents of young children are the most willing to take action.

People are most likely to act within their existing networks, so advocates should look for ways to affiliate with places of faith and other community networks to expand their base of activists. They are also more willing to be involved in activities that are short-term, focused on a goal, and that can be done in their community or with their children.

Lesson 7—In the short-term, the new millennium can be a powerful theme to draw attention to children's issues.

To a certain extent, people feel strongly enough about children's issues that they do not need a message to tell them why they should care. They just need to be told what solutions will work. The new millennium offers an opportunity to ask people to look at the communities they want for children, and assess how we can build that future. It is a theme that causes people to look forward to what can be, rather than focus on the current problems which seem hopeless, or look backward to what can never be again. It is an opportunity to have a dialogue about society's ability to raise good kids—a theme inclusive of children's issues such as education, crime, and values.

First Words Used When Thinking of Children	
Innocent	Working mothers
Guidance	Future
Keep your fingers crossed.	Happy
Love	Helpless
Peace	Little
Special	Scared
Work	Precious
Abuse	Violence
Day care	My child
Family— mother, father	My grandchildren
School	

THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

People do not need to be convinced that children are in trouble. They already know it. They feel overwhelmed by the problems and are unable to identify solutions.

When parents think of children, the first thoughts that come to mind are images of their own children and a sense of innocence and helplessness. However, their worries and fears for other children quickly follow these first thoughts.

Some people are so overwhelmed by the problems that they become apathetic rather than motivated. "I find dealing with today's children and teenagers and young adults, they are discouraging," explained a senior woman. "But I have to stay in a mode or a method or a plan that is positive or I can't survive."

It is not just parents who are concerned about the state of children. "I don't even have children," noted a woman (Democrat), "and I think this whole country is a disgrace as it regards children in almost every aspect."

One woman (Independent) voiced a frequent concern, "kids today grow up a lot faster than they did in my era. When you see them today and compared to where we were, they are so far ahead of the game already and they know so much more." However, another woman explained the issue further by noting, "See I don't think that they are growing up. I think they are getting knowledge but they are really not growing up because they don't have any positive role models there to help them to grow up. They are just having knowledge thrown at them but they don't know how to deal with any of it."

The country's priorities are wrong. We invest in the wrong things.

The focus groups were held at the height of the Lewinsky media coverage. Several participants wondered why so much money was spent on what they saw as an unimportant issue. "My concern is they spent $60 million," noted a woman (Democrat). "Why didn't they 'waste' it on education?" A woman (Republican) asked, "And how many billions went into the Starr investigation. For what?"

Participants in Arizona and Maryland quickly pointed to poor state priorities for funding. "The first thing that comes to mind for me is all the money that we put into everything else," complained a woman (Republican). "I mean what was it, $250 million for a ball park? I'm sorry but yeah, it is a beautiful ball park but what could that money have

gone for?" "The lottery . . . was supposed to go for children," noted a woman (Democrat). "It is not happening and the schools are in worse shape than they have ever been—counties as well as city."

First Words Used When Thinking of Teenagers		
Rough	Peer pressure	They know everything.
Crazy	Lot of love and	Immoral
Teen pregnancy	patience	Trouble
It's a job.	Oh my God	I guess violence,
Guidance	Headaches	drugs, sex.
Patience	Moody	

While "children" are innocent and precious, "teenagers" are feared. Children are full of potential and ready to be molded, while teens are already finished—for good or ill.

Ask people to cite what first comes to mind when they think of teens, and those with teenagers will voice their personal parenting frustrations. Those without teenagers will note the problems they see with rough teens in trouble. Anyone who voices a positive view of teens is quickly shouted down. Note the following, telling exchange among senior citizens: "And it is good to see these strong, wonderful teenagers that are positive . . . I think that the majority of our young people are on the positive approach," explained one senior woman. "The majority?" roared the other group participants. "Oh, I think a lot of them aren't," disagreed another.

Some believe that children need careful attention in the early years, that "key 3-10 year old stage." "You need to be really concerned about children from about the age of three to about 10," noted a senior man. "If you don't get their attention in whatever area you think they should . . . and get them headed in the right direction as far as society is concerned, then I think by the time they reach 10, you have an awful time of ever turning them around." However, a few believe society "puts a lot of emphasis on kids, babies. By the time they get [to be] teens, we think they should be responsible and we take the focus off of them when the focus should be on them so they can go into adulthood." (African American woman)

The news media has a powerful ability to shape people's view of the status of children. Since people are hungry for information about children, advocates can use the news media to focus attention on the issues. However, because people are paying attention to the sensationalistic news coverage about children, they have an overwhelmingly pessimistic view of the status of children.

This research clearly demonstrates the public has an enormous hunger for information regarding the status of children. Well before people understood that the topic of discussion was children, participants were asked to respond to a series of newspaper headlines. The non-children related headlines were drawn from one day's newspaper headlines (though adjusted to not be time sensitive or dated). Participants were asked to place each of the headlines into one of three categories based on the action they thought they would take if they saw that headline in the newspaper: (1) would read the article thoroughly; (2) would skim the article; or (3) would pass it by. Though focus groups are not a method for quantifiable results, it is striking that the nearly 70 focus group participants were more likely to read the stories about children than any other subject area.

Headlines, Ranked by Most to Least Read

- Program Successful in Helping Children
- Conditions for (state) Children Getting Worse, But Better than Rest of Country
- (state) Ranks 35th for Children
- (state) Children Best off in the Region
- Growing Up in America—One Child's Story
- Poverty Reclaims Many Who Overcame It
- (state) Receives a C- From Children's Advocates
- Missouri Girl Trapped Underwater Dies
- Divers Find Recorder Amid Wreckage of Jet
- Presidential Impeachment Hearings Moving Forward
- Employers Go Behind Bars in Search of Job Candidates
- Fiery Crash Claims Three
- Russia Defends Economic Plan
- Judge Says Israel Can Extradite
- Lewinsky Talks
- 40 Years for New Jersey Purse Thief
- Employer, Union Recess Talks in Strike

People only see negative media coverage of children. This type of coverage has caused them to feel the problems are overwhelming and becoming increasingly worse.

Focus group participants firmly believe crime by and against children is pervasive and growing, yet they do not refer to personal experiences to demonstrate those beliefs. They point to the media.

They believe crime is "everywhere," "out of control," "rampant," and "an epidemic." "It is daily. It is constant," according to one woman (Republican). A man (Independent) suggested that people are not out in their communities anymore because "they are inside watching TV on how terrible it is outside." Another man (Independent) described crime as a "cage . . . Because you are stuck in there and you are scared to go out. You don't want to venture out into the world. You stay locked up. All your doors are locked and everything at night. Make sure your chains are on, your windows are locked and sit in the corner."

The only stories about children that people see in the news are "negative," "sensationalized," "violence," "tragic stories," "people that abuse children," "gang violence," and "kids killing kids." "When they do something good or positive," scoffed an African American woman, "it is usually like the last 20 seconds—a feel-good piece." If they do know of children who are doing positive things, it is through their own personal experiences. "I think I'm more conscious of the fact that there are many positives that the children are doing," noted an African American woman, "but it is through church and organizations that I belong to. But the news seems to really play up nothing but negatives."

Some African Americans are concerned their children are singled out for negative attention. "I don't mean this to sound racist or anything," an African American woman confessed, "but I see that they seem to put more negative first regarding our children and they play up so much little things you may say it is not such a big deal."

At least some people are angry enough about what they see on the local news that they are turning it off. "I think we're all so inundated with the tragedy every day," complained a woman (Democratic). "You don't want to listen. Usually, I'll listen to

the little recap they do before the news and if there is something that I know that is happening either governmentally, state or whatever that I say, 'Oh I want to catch that.' Once those are done, I can't take any more. One more murder, one more . . ." "TV stations dwell on it," noted another. "The more gore they can give you, the better they like it."

The critical problem for children's advocates is that people are becoming apathetic about the problems. "You are reading stuff like that all day, so it comes and goes," noted a man (Independent). "You really don't have a feeling for it anymore." "It is almost to the point," noted another, "where you are getting callused to everything. You are bombarded with it constantly either on the radio, television or the newspaper that it gets to the point you are only concerned about your own little circle—just your family."

CRAFTING A STORY WITH IMPACT

People are paying attention to news about children, but to have a positive impact leading to action, news stories need to:

1. Show successes or solutions,
2. Stay local, and
3. Broaden beyond the individual, or personal story.

People want to see positive news about children, not just to make themselves feel good but because they are desperate for solutions.

Participants were asked to rank a series of headlines and lead paragraphs based on which they would be most to least likely to read. Each headline and lead paragraph took a different approach to discussing an issue. This exercise was intended to uncover the components of a story that will make it interesting. To avoid issue bias, the same approach was used for two other issue areas, (1) healthcare and (2) poverty. In each instance, the "positive" headlines and lead paragraphs tended to be more intriguing to participants.

Headlines, Ranked by Most to Least Read

Healthcare Focus

- Program Successful in Helping Children
- (state)'s Children Best off in the Region
- (state) Ranks 35th for Children
- (city) Receives a D- From Children's Advocates
- Conditions for (state) Children Getting Worse, But Better than Rest of Country
- One Teenager's Story

Poverty Focus

- Program Successful in Helping Children
- Growing up in America—One Child's Story
- (state)'s Children Best Off in the Region
- Conditions for (state) Children Getting Worse, But Better than Rest of Country
- (city) Receives a D- from Children's Advocates
- (state) Ranks 35th for Children

In describing his interest in a story comparing his state's successes on children with the national average, one African American man said it interested him "because when you hear the national average, even though that could be improvement, I see that we are doing something right." "Because it says, 'successful,'" noted an another man (Independent). "You want to know what is successful about it. Maybe it would be interesting to you or help you." A woman (Democrat) noted simply, "I wanted to see what we were doing right."

Participants indicated that they were interested in the "positive" story because they are searching for solutions. A woman (Independent) is looking for stories that will "say it is going to get better and what can we do to make it better." "Again, any program that is set up to remove one of the safety nets that the government, state or local provide, will always interest me," noted an African American man. "So it is another step in removing a safety net that is an empowerment step. It is saying out there that someone is getting a positive message across."

They are less interested in the headlines that suggest the environment is bad or getting worse for children because, noted one woman (Republican), "everybody knows it is happening," and they really want to know "what we're going to do about it."

People also want to see stories that affect them where they live. In describing her interest in a headline, a woman (Democrat) explained, "Because it said, 'Maryland' . . . I live in Maryland." "Although we really care about children all over the world," another woman (Republican) explained, "I think we also need to take care of children right here at home and directly at home is Arizona."

It is not critical to tell the story through a personal viewpoint. A personal view appeals to people who are already drawn to the story but does nothing to attract them if they are not already interested. Furthermore, readers then focus on the problem of the individual rather than the broader pattern.

In the healthcare example (teen pregnancy), the human interest approach was the least interesting approach for participants, while the poverty example (a young girl caring for her siblings) with the personal story approach was the second most interesting story. The lack of interest in the teen's personal story was the same whether the headline included teen pregnancy or not.

In reacting to a story about one teenager's pregnancy that served to introduce the statistics on teen pregnancy, people who were interested in the story had a pre-existing interest in teen pregnancy. "I guess I'd be interested in knowing what else the article may have about her," reacted a man (Independent). "I support a teen pregnancy clinic, so that caught my interest."

Those who were not already interested in teen pregnancy were not drawn in by the personal angle. "There is always one sad story that you can write about," noted a woman (Independent). "There is a million other people that had the same situation." "Because I don't care about this individual person," noted a woman (Republican).

There is also the danger that people will identify with the personal story, putting their own interpretation on it, rather than bridging to the bigger picture, as these articles usually intend. In reacting to a story about a 10-year-old girl who was responsible for caring for her younger siblings, seniors thought of her as a strong responsible girl rather than relating her situation to broader problems (even though the statistics of the broader problems were outlined). "But this makes the children stronger," noted a senior woman. "It builds character," added another. "It is a sad story but it is positive," stated a senior woman. "She is helping her mother. She is helping herself. She is growing up responsible."

When people see the individual, they will sometimes act for the individual rather than see or act on the broader issue. One woman (Republican) discussed how her office acts on articles they see. "Like the last thing we just did was the little boy who kept getting the cancer growths," she explained, "and we put an e-mail out and we said you need to help. The family didn't have medical and their bills were piling up. So yeah, we throw things out like that every once in awhile."

While statistical information may help in conversations with legislators, or may help attract media interest in a story, readers rely very little on the actual statistics.

As focus group participants talked about the stories, few relied heavily on the statistics to outline why there is a problem or why they found the story interesting. They were much more likely to discuss the issues broadly or complain about the causes and lack of solutions.

According to an African American woman, "I'm always leery looking at statistics because statistics are not—it depends on what was the group that you took the statistics from." One woman (Democrat) referred to "a bunch of numbers being thrown at you."

The public is currently very angry about the media's misplaced news priorities. Substantive coverage of children's issues can help them recover their image.

Since these groups were conducted during a period of intense media coverage of the Lewinsky scandal, people were in a mood to express their anger and frustration with the media's focus on the sensationalistic. They also raised concerns over the impact of news on children.

"Instead of the newspapers focusing on things that really—that dominate the world," complained an African American woman, "they are dominating with this girl with this cheap Gap dress and getting ready to get rid of a President."

One of the more interesting findings focused on people's concern over the impact of the news on children who may be watching. "You've got seven year olds and six year olds that are asking, 'mommy what is semen on a dress?'" noted a woman (Independent). But the concern does not stop with the Lewinsky story. This same woman worries that children "see all the negativity in the world and I think it scares them because they are so used to an innocent world, playing with their toys and everything else. It scares them."

"They tell you... you should monitor the programs your children watch," complained another woman (Democrat). "I'm all for that but you have to monitor the news. It is worse than the programs."

Seniors, in particular, are skeptical of the media's credibility. One senior man warned, "you really can't believe a lot of what they put in the paper." "When it gets out of context," noted a senior woman, "it can mean something totally different. They do that with the President, Vice President and everybody else." They can point to examples such as taking "The Phoenix Republic and the Tempe Tribune and the same story would have two different headlines and read totally different in each paper."

One senior man volunteered that he had "been interviewed on some marches or some protests that we've been in on and when it is shown on TV, it isn't what I said. They cut out the pieces that they want."

THE ISSUES—COMMON THEMES

Individuals are solely responsible for their situation / Bootstrap Mentality.

Part of the American psyche is that any child can grow up to be President—there are no limitations on anyone. Ultimately, a message will not be successful if it collides with this core value. This theme was interwoven throughout the focus group conversations and was expressed in a variety of ways.

Some participants point to their own history as proof that anyone can get ahead if they have drive and ambition. "I'm a grandson of a share cropper," noted an African American man. "I look back at my great grandfather and his father is on a farm and everybody trying to improve down that chain. My father never finished sixth grade but he put all of his kids through school. He worked two jobs [to put] all of his kids through school."

Others reject that anyone outside of the family has any responsibility at all for the well being of children. "I don't get into what the government should do or what school should do or what the teacher should do," explained an African American man. "It is your kid. It is your problem. You fix it and then tell everybody how you did it and maybe you'll get 10 million more people to do that."

When discussing welfare, people noted that a lack of responsibility is at the core of the problem. "You have to teach the individual to be responsible for themselves," explained an African American woman, "and if they have kids, they need to be responsible for themselves first and take care of the kids." "Some do not even try to save themselves. We had the CETA program," a man (Independent) explained. "They didn't even attend classes to get the learning to try to help themselves."

The working poor, whom people admire as hard-working and responsible, are also ultimately responsible for their own situation and their own salvation. A woman (Democrat) explained, "The working poor should try to save whatever they can so they can get up and out of the predicament that they're in."

Even when discussing healthcare, which people believe is a basic right for everyone, one man (Independent) pointed to individual responsibility. "If they [employer] have a plan and they care about their families, they should [pay for their family to have insurance]."

Defining a broad-based solution?

People's ability to understand and support broad-based solutions by government, business, or society depends upon the issue being discussed. Healthcare is on one end of the continuum with people able to see no action for an individual other than to pay or not to pay the insurance companies. Yet they readily refer to government's ability to reform the industry. The debate over healthcare reform educated people about the role that government could have in changing the healthcare system. They also refer to the economy and trends in business that have affected healthcare coverage. One African American man talked about the impact of US businesses going abroad "for cheaper labor, so they hire you—use A man and you were making $20 an hour. Now we're going to have your same job. They hire him as a B man doing your same job. Your job is eliminated. The only job I have is a B job. Same job, different title but you don't have no benefits."

Poverty is at the mid-point of the continuum with people seeing an individual's responsibility to spend wisely and to take their education seriously. However, they also see a role for government to provide opportunities for education, day care subsidies, and health insurance to those who are struggling to improve their situation. Participants were fairly knowledgeable about efforts to reform welfare and referred to those efforts to bolster their point that recipients

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should be given the tools they need to get off welfare permanently.

Lastly, crime is at the other end of the continuum, with people quickly seeing the role of individuals to raise their children well. Even when they come to understand the impact of communities on juvenile crime, they still point to individuals within a community as the solution (neighborhood watch, or plucky individuals who have taken back the streets). "If people truly think they have a problem in their neighborhood," noted one man (Independent), "they will make an effort to try to fix it from within."

"I take care of my neighborhood and you take care of your neighborhood," suggested a woman (Independent). They have a very difficult time seeing solutions beyond the individual. Further research in this area should work to uncover the examples of systemic solutions for strong communities that people will find compelling.

One person cannot make a difference.

Though they repeatedly point to individual responsibility, there is also an undercurrent of apathy and inability to make a difference in focus group participants' language. This apathy goes beyond the cynicism in institutions that is repeatedly seen in research. Instead, the tone borders on a shoulder-shrugging, "what-can-you-do?" attitude. Note the following dialogue among men (Independent) in reference to a newspaper article:

> "You hear that all day."
> "What can you do about it?"
> "It goes on and on."
> "...in the papers and everything. You are reading stuff like that all day, so it comes and goes. You really don't have a feeling for it anymore."

Poverty is a "part of the balance of the universe," an African American man stated with a tone of resignation. A woman (Republican) expressed, "And in all honesty it can make you very depressed and overwhelmed if you feel like I am one person and there is only so much I can do. Then you are taking the whole world on your shoulders, that is a lot." In responding to an example of one woman who turned a community around, a woman (Republican) noted, "We are all capable of doing it, but it takes a special person that passes that inertia and does it."

The worthy v. the unworthy

Participants repeatedly suggest that generosity is an appropriate value, but only if those who receive the benefits of that generosity are "truly" needy or deserving. The conversations concerning welfare drew most of the dialogue around this theme.

A woman (Independent) noted, "Welfare, for the people that really need it, is fine. But most of the people on there I think are scamming the system. They are trying to freeload off the rest of us." "And another thing that I think that we have done," noted a senior woman, "is given too much of freebies to a lot of these people. Some of them are worthy. Some of them are not." Part of this "worthiness" is polite behavior. "I've been there," argued an African American woman. "It is how you conduct yourself. When I was on [welfare], my kid was clean and so on and so forth. Cuss my children? No. Some of these people now, it is like oh Jesus, you'd be embarrassed. They have no home training. I don't care if we had one potato, we knew how to act." "So very many cases show that the people who really are morally good people that deserve it so often don't get it," complained a senior woman.

Some are more direct than others with the racist component of this belief. One

Caucasian man (Independent) pointed to another across the table stating, "I bet you his daughter had a hell of a time getting on it [welfare], but the other people don't have a problem getting on it."

All problems can be traced to working women.

The theme most consistently expressed throughout the groups and the issues was the idea that life was better when mothers were at home. Communities were more closely knit because the women all knew each other, people believe. There was no crime because women watched the neighborhoods and children knew how to act with respect. The plight of the working poor, they assert, is due to the greed and standards of dual income families, but also due to the low wages that require women to work to support their families.

People believe kids are paying the price for dual income families. One African American woman referred to "mother and father having to go to work to get things for the kids and not being at home with the kids or the mothers having to work to keep up, or help pay the mortgage. So the kids are kind of getting short-changed." In the past "it was always every mother on the block was home and now it is the opposite. Now it is every mother on the block is working and the kid has got to come home and clean house, make sure the brothers and sisters are in and it is robbing the kids of their younger years and I think it is going to reflect later in society. (Independent woman)

Communities are suffering as well, because people do not know their neighbors in the way they used to. "I never see my neighbors anymore," complained a woman (Republican). "I'm never out there, for one thing, because I'm busy doing what I've got to do to survive and that is just maintaining a home." "Probably communities can come back," a man (Independent) stated, "but another aspect that you have right now is no one is home. You've got two of the adults in the household working usually." "They used to sit on their porches in the evening," noted another man (Independent). "They didn't have the air-conditioning so they were outside sitting on the porch. They went to small stores. They walked up and down the streets and these people would watch. They watched their neighborhoods."

Since women are working rather than tying the community together, people no longer have the kind of relationships with neighbors that allow them to interact with others' children in a disciplinary or pseudo parental role. "Like in the old days," remembered a woman (Republican), "not that long ago, people that are 50 and even my age, 40 and up, remember that if you did something wrong the mother down the street was going to call your mother to tell her." "Nowadays people think you are a buttinsky," according to another woman (Independent). "You try to tell them something about your kid or what to do or whatever," another added. "They resent any input."

Some believe we have the wrong priorities and "everybody is chasing the dollar and they don't really care about the kids" (African American man). "People are buying things and buying things," noted a woman (Independent). "They are working to buy things. Like she said before, we're working but we're poor because we're not really saving. We're buying, buying, buying." However, most are not blaming women for this change in society. They believe families need two incomes today. "With today's standards you need second jobs," noted a senior woman.

Finally, participants place some of the blame on companies that are not family friendly. An woman (Independent) complained about her daughter's employer, "Sometimes she doesn't get home until 7 or 8 o'clock at night. They don't care that she has a family at home. They don't care." Another added, "Part of it is also like corporate America ... there used to be such a thing as banker's hours and even bankers don't keep it anymore. There is no 9 to 5 anymore."

THE ISSUES—HEALTHCARE

There are two overwhelming healthcare concerns for people today: (1) the expense of insurance coverage, and (2) the loopholes and fine print they believe insurance companies employ to avoid paying claims.

People firmly believe health insurance has become unaffordable for the average person.

First Words Used When Thinking of Healthcare		
HMOs	Dispose of them	Too many rules
Rip off	Expensive	Unhealthy
Deprived	Incompetent doctors	
Deteriorated	Money	

"Poor or rich or middle class, you just can't afford it," complained an African American woman. "If your company doesn't provide at least part of it," explained a senior woman, "you can't afford it." A woman (Independent) raged, "You go to the doctor and you are getting raped, basically. 'I have a sore throat.' '$175 to look at your throat.' 'Excuse me?'" "There's different classes of care," noted an African American man, "and unfortunately, if you don't have a lot of money you are not going to get good healthcare."

Even those with insurance are not secure in their coverage. Everyone has experienced, or knows someone who has experienced, problems getting a claim paid. This leaves many feeling as though they are not really insured which causes them to empathize with the truly uninsured.

"I've got a buddy," shared a man (Independent). "His wife just passed away probably about seven weeks ago—cancer. They are denying it now . . . She's got a bill of $550,000." An African American man remembered, "Just an article in the paper how some women who are delivering, they needed an epidural but they didn't have cash, wouldn't get it. That is ridiculous."

The core of the problem is that insurance companies do not really care about people's health.

Sidebar Exchange Among Democratic Women
"Who does?"
"All the welfare people."
"They have cellular phones?"
"Oh yeah."
"They make their drug deals."
"Yeah. Oh sure, and beepers."
"Pagers."
"I don't have any of those."

"I think what is wrong is how the big corporations have taken over healthcare," noted an African American man. "It is hard to get good care or treatment now even if you do have insurance." "It is strictly numbers," noted a man (Independent). "That is all they care about." Another agreed, "it's a business. It is

not a compassionate situation." "The insurance companies are making the money," complained a woman (Democrat). "With the HMO, people don't realize that they pay money for it and then they still have to pay the doctor."

There continues to be robust support for universal healthcare because of these horror stories.

"Give health insurance to everybody and take care of our homeless," argued one woman (Independent). "There is no need in this country that we should have homeless people when we can send billions of dollars to foreign countries and we don't know those people from Adam." "But see, all that could be eliminated if you just had universal healthcare," stated an African American man. "I mean healthcare for everybody, no exceptions." "This Polish gentleman told me in communist countries they get free insurance and free education," stated a man (Independent). "I thought that was awesome." "They need to revamp the health system in this country like Hillary attempted to do," expressed an African American woman.

This is another example of the wrong financial priorities. "But when they put a one percent tax increase on us to build a ball park," complained a woman (Republican), "I would be more than happy to do a two point increase just for healthcare. I would have no problem paying to have healthcare for everybody."

Focus group participants do not really understand why health coverage for children would be controversial. "Nobody should have to worry about whether their children are going to be taken care of," stated a woman (Republican). Another agreed, "Anything is better than nothing. I honestly believe any child in the United States under 18 years of age and in a school should automatically be covered. They should automatically have health and dental."

Who Does Not Have Health Insurance?

Hispanics—usually, the low echelons	Small companies
I think about we as black people.	Lower income, mentally disabled
The homeless	and things like that
Poor people	Middle class
Senior citizens	Part-time employees
Unemployed people and the under	Self-employed
employed	The working poor
Retired people, some widows	There is a lot of children.
Low paying jobs	Working couples
Single parents	Young people with children

Though there is enormous support for universal healthcare for children, this is not an easy win. The nuances of how healthcare for children is positioned are critical to its success or failure.

Though people voice strong support for providing health insurance for all children, there are several warning signs in how they talk about the issue that indicate this will not be an easy reform. First, as already outlined, people are consumed by their own personal struggles with health insurers (expense, doctor choice, claims coverage, etc.). Further, they do not immediately think of the uninsured as a top-of-mind health problem, and children are not immediately thought of as uninsured. Finally, people can find reasons to explain

away the lack of coverage for lower income children, and in doing so, lose much of the energy of the issue. A broad debate about coverage for all children has more energy than a narrow debate about some children.

Respondents believe the uninsured to be a broad and diverse group. Many can cite examples of how they or a close friend to be went without insurance or came close to doing so. "I had a heart attack and I couldn't get insurance for 10 years," confessed a woman (Democrat). A woman (Republican) noted, "I didn't have healthcare for eight years." "I can go by my own experience," noted an African American woman. "I work for a company, and I make very good money but my company will only pay for benefits for myself. For me to have benefits for my children, it has to come out of my paycheck." "I know people that can't afford it because it is several hundred dollars a month and they don't have the money," stated a woman (Democrat). "I have a lot of single girls that work with me that have children," a woman (Republican) noted. "No insurance. The girls have no insurance." "My sister-in-law was in real estate and self-employed," another woman (Republican) explained. "She is divorced and has two kids and for her and her two sons it was $500 or $600 a month. That is the rent, you know. So it is just too much, too expensive."

Since people think, "there by the grace of God go I," there is strong support for reforming healthcare, particularly providing insurance to all. However, their belief in the breadth of the problem also means that children do not stand out as a key priority group. "I don't think we think about children automatically," noted an African American man. Another further explained, "It would be the same conditions that prevent their parents from having healthcare. If, for example, their job doesn't offer healthcare, the children wouldn't be covered."

Though people seem strongly in support of healthcare for all children, a close examination of the language they use indicates weak spots in their support. The conversation easily moves from "us" to "they."

People use examples of innocent victims of the greedy insurance companies—good, hardworking people (like themselves) who are struggling through the day:

> "It is not only just the poor now. It is working class now. It is a growing problem. (Independent man)

> "Maybe the husband is out working at a menial job, but he makes too much for even his wife to get on ADCF let alone the children. So the wife and the children don't have any and there is a lot of them, I believe." (Senior woman)

> "You are a working mother and you work for a company and let's say your insurance as a single person that you have to pay out of your pocket would be $50 a month. The company is paying the rest. But now it is not the child that you have one or 21 children, you are a family. Now you go from $50 to let's say $100 a month . . . And you are not making a tremendous amount and now you suddenly can't afford family so you don't cover the child." (Democratic woman)

> "It is not widely available for the person who is working full time but not earning a whole lot of money." (Republican woman)

> "The kid is cornered by some gang bangers who think he is a gang banger. He is not. So they decide to hit him in the head with a crow bar and shoot him in the chest.

The kid goes to three hospitals before he is finally driven, not stabilized in any of those institutions—driven to Cook County where he loses four pints of blood and barely survives. Now I don't mean to make this seem like a horror story but if you don't have finances or adequate insurance, these hospitals didn't even stabilize this kid." (African American man)

"Oh no, when people need healthcare, I think they should have healthcare. But I'm talking about the people that can come in here and take and take and take and take and don't give. They don't pay taxes. They don't give anything to the state as opposed to those of us who have worked all of our lives and paid taxes all of our lives." (Senior woman)

Once focus group participants move beyond a conversation about people they identify with, they start to rationalize the lack of healthcare coverage. For example, they note that the care already exists, people just do not know how to find it:

"No one here is denied healthcare, in my knowledge, and I've been with the county 28 years. You can get it. There is no problem about it." (Independent man)

"I think it is more of an educated thing for the parents that are not out seeking the information—are there agencies that provide these things that are not getting the message out to a lot of people?" (African American man)

"A lot of these people don't have the resources to know who to go to." (Democratic woman)

Or do not care enough to look for it:

"If they've got sense enough to get their hair done and their nails done, why can't they take three hours off and take their child?" (African American woman)

"I think sometimes they are ashamed. I don't know why." (Democratic woman)

"Look at the ones that do have medical assistance and medical assistance do pay for a lot of things for children but the parents don't take their children. They don't want to get up and go." (African American woman)

"You pay—it might have been $20 a year. A lot of these kids don't even have parents that care." (Democratic woman)

"You have some mothers that are on drugs. The only thing they are thinking of is getting that shot." (African American woman)

"If they [employer] have a plan and they care about their families, they should [pay for their family to have insurance]." (Independent man)

To maintain the energy of the issue, children's healthcare coverage needs to be about ordinary people with whom average voters can identify. Examples such as employees of small companies, recently divorced couples with young children, part-time employees, can help to keep the dialogue relevant to a broad audience.

THE ISSUES—POVERTY

There is strong support for welfare reform.

Focus group participants are fairly knowledgeable about efforts to reform welfare and strongly support those efforts. "Washington and New Jersey have programs like the poor people clean the streets and stuff like that to keep them off the street and get them started in jobs that way," noted a man (Independent). "As it stands right now," expressed an African American man, "Wisconsin had a good idea. Every able body has to work. Michigan just cut it off. That was good but you know, with the checks and balances, some people went through the cracks." "New Jersey has a new way," according to a woman (Democrat). "You are only allowed to stay on it for a couple of years or something."

They believe welfare was designed to "help you get on your feet. It's just over the last 25 years it became a way of life...But welfare never was supposed to be 'this is how I'll spend until the day I die,' or a generational thing." (African American woman) Most think recipients should "have to earn it. If you want the welfare money, they can go earn it. There is ways to earn it." (Independent man)

Welfare is a web people cannot escape. "Once you get into it," explained a woman (Republican), "it is very hard to get out of because you try to go to school so that you can get an education, so you can get yourself a better job. And if you get yourself a better job but it doesn't pay as much, you lose your benefits." Some African American participants point to welfare as adding to the struggles of race. One African American woman noted, "It has been our downfall." "Waiting in the welfare line," sighed an African American woman. "Waiting for that check. Waiting to get that check. Waiting for that job. Waiting and time is just wasting and we're staying in the same place. We're not getting ahead. As a whole we're just staying in the same place."

Focus group participants believe that many people are better off on welfare than working. One woman (Democrat) who is a human resources manager explained her own experience in offering single mothers jobs: "It may have been like a $7 an hour job and they laugh at me and they say, 'No, I can make more money than that staying on welfare.'" "I recently saw a young girl here from Louisiana," shared an African American man. "She could have gotten a minimum wage job out there scanning packages. She had a two-year-old. I told her to 'go to welfare; go to public aid. Get on public aid. Get your medical card. Try to get you some Section 8. Try to get a couple dollars. Try to get yourself set and then you can jump out there and get a minimum wage job' because she wouldn't have been able to pay for certain necessities."

While many still harbor some anger towards welfare recipients, the energy has turned toward wanting to give those on welfare the tools they need to succeed.

People on welfare (or the seemingly poor) have luxuries, according to some focus group participants. "They drive better cars than we do," noted a woman (Independent). A man (Independent) referred to "panhandling with a $150 pair of Jordans on or something." "I think a lot of people on welfare have food stamps and they buy shrimp and they buy all the luxuries," noted a senior woman.

Some take this very personally. "I would have no problem with welfare if I knew that the majority of the people on welfare definitely needed it," explained a man (Independent). "But like I said I see so many people out there that I know are abusing the system. It just kind of eats away at me." Another added, "There is a lot of people out there having kids and they are making money off of it...I have a kid and I have to pay for my kid."

They are particularly angry about the kind of parents they believe welfare recipients are. "You say if we don't give them more money then those children are going to suffer," noted a senior man. "But from my experience, children don't get it anyway. The mother has the children so she can get the money for what she wants to spend it on, not for the children." "Some of these parents could care less," complained a woman (Democrat). "Look at the kids that are wandering the streets that are robbing—the five and six and eight year olds who are robbing stores to try to put food on the table with mothers and fathers who are on drugs or in jail...getting paid for being disabled because they are drug addicts."

Though there continues to be some resentment towards people on welfare, people are far more sympathetic than a few years ago. They do not want to simply "tell somebody you've got six months to get a job or else you are off welfare" (Independent man). They want to make sure efforts to reform welfare give people the tools they need to get off permanently. A woman (Democrat) worried, "How can you say, 'listen, we're going to give you money. We're going to help you out for two years. Then you are on your own.' Then oh my God, you know, 'I don't have any tools.'" They know that "someone working at McDonald's—there's not a chance in hell that they can possibly afford to" pay for day care (Democratic woman). "It should help provide child care so that these mothers who are entry level might only pay $7 an hour, but you can't pay for child care and make $7 an hour and still buy dinner and all that and pay rent." (Democratic woman) Others would like to see them get "education, teaching them on the job, job training."

Education is key to solving the problems of welfare and the working poor.

Education is a key determinant of whether or not a person will ever be lifted out of poverty, people say. "If you don't have enough education," expressed an African American man, "you can't really make that much money. That is how money is given out according to your education." "I think if you look at most of those people I think most of them either didn't finish high school or didn't go past high school," a woman (Republican) stated.

Those in poverty are responsible for getting the education they need to get ahead. "But you can go back," noted a woman (Democrat). "Catonsville Community College has a program right now...will take you and train you."

While some look to job skills to improve the lot of poor families, many believe better consumer and investing skills will help solve the problem. "They are overspending," noted an African American man. "I mean if you don't have any money, no money, and you have to go and you have to use that credit card, which you are probably paying a higher interest rate than someone with a platinum credit, you are spending more money. You are never going to catch up." They would like to see people learn "how to better spend your money. Make your money go farther." (African American woman) "Show them how to clip coupons," noted a woman (Democrat). Or "consumer awareness to teach them how to shop," added another. As naive as this may sound, participants make these suggestions because they see people spending unwisely. "I know one guy lives in an apartment at the end of the deli," shared a woman (Democrat). "He works two jobs. He works for us and for another company and spends $100 a week on lottery tickets."

As welfare is reformed, people want to protect children. However, they firmly believe efforts to reform welfare are in the best long-term interest of children, even if it means short-term pain.

When given the option to just cut off welfare, people respond, "Well, you can't do that. She still has children." (Republican woman) Women, in particular, worry about what might happen to the children. "The two-year time period runs out," imagined a woman (Democrat), "These kids are going to be suffering. They are not going to go to school because they are not going to have clothes to go to school. They are going to go on the streets. They are going to sell drugs because they can make money selling drugs and you don't need to be educated to sell drugs." "There is still this gap of how to help the children because the parents might get a job that is very minimum wage," worried a woman (Independent). "How will they feed those kids? How will they take care of their healthcare? How will they—with welfare they at least had a green card which would get medicine and some healthcare for the children when they get sick."

They would like to see supports in place to protect children while parents are being weaned off welfare. "Let them go through the child care, the child's health insurance, even clothes," suggested a woman (Democrat). "I don't know how it would all work out but you take care of the kids while the parent is going through a process of learning skills, being educated, getting a job."

Though they do not want to see children suffer, they believe the best thing they can do for the child's future is to break the welfare cycle.

"Children have to be trained from a very early age you don't sit on your buns and watch TV all day long," complained a senior woman. "Consequently, you've got to teach these children from the time they walk. 'You've got to work.' My children from the time they started toddling, they helped me make a bed. Maybe they didn't do it right, but they started helping to do things." Another added, "I think children as well as adults should be trained thoroughly. You must work. You must support yourself." "I think if you are raised where your parents never worked and they collected a welfare check all the time . . . they drink and they argued and they fought," stated a man (Independent), "that becomes part of your life. When you get to that age, that is all you've ever seen. You fall right into the same trap."

During the course of the focus group dialogue, participants were exposed to a series of created headlines and lead paragraphs about children. One of the articles describes a young girl who is responsible for caring for her younger brother and sister until her mother gets home from work at 8:30 p.m. Instead of condemning the harshness of this young girl's life, people point to this example as a positive model. "I kind of relate," a woman (Independent) shared. "When I was young my mom worked, and my dad worked, and I would have to come home after school, and I'd start dinner and I'd finish it and make sure my younger brothers and sisters did their homework, and we'd do the dishes and do homework . . . I didn't consider it poverty . . . This was just a way of life." "She is going to grow up to have so much more savviness and street smarts," another woman (Republican) professed, "because she knows what it is going to take."

I am the working poor.

While the "working poor" are perceived positively as people who work hard and do the best they can, it is not really a reference that inspires collective action. First, to a certain extent, people think of themselves, of middle America, as working poor. "Working poor, isn't that all of us?" asked a woman (Independent). Added another, "I think it is the majority of America right now."

An African American woman defined working poor as anyone who is "living from paycheck to paycheck." "I consider myself [working poor] too," noted a man (Independent). "I support my wife and kid on a single income check. I work hard for my money, and it seems like you live week to week sometimes." "See, I think the working poor is the middle class," explained a woman (Democrat). "You go to work every day. You just make ends meet."

The term "working poor" taps people's "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mentality. Even if they do not consider themselves working poor now, many of them feel they once were. "Five years ago I was the working poor," explained a Democratic woman. "I moved out of my parent's house and moved up here. When I came up here I didn't have a job." "Until recently, I would say that we were working poor because we owed everybody," confessed an African American woman. "By the time we finished paying our bills, we didn't have money."

Though many people believe they should be classified as working poor, further discussion demonstrates they do see a difference. "Working poor" is long-term, while their own economic situations are, or were, short-term.

The following views of the working poor, expressed by focus group participants in terms of magazine pictures they chose to depict the working poor, indicate they see the working poor as those who are in a desperate economic condition for the long-term. They are hard working people, who did not get the kind of education that would allow them to advance to better conditions.

VIEWS OF THE WORKING POOR

"I have a picture of this lady. It looks like she is standing at the top of a cliff. I imagine she is so stressed out from being poor she doesn't know which way to turn. She may be planning to jump." (African American woman)

"My picture is a woman standing at the top of a cliff. It kind of looks like it could be in the Serengeti plain in Africa or somewhere. And probably just thinking that is probably how her life looks to this point...the harder I work, the behinder I get. No matter how much they work, they can't seem to get ahead." (Democratic woman)

"I chose this picture here because it's a lot of seals or whatever it is. To me working people just barely afloat trying to make it and a lot of it has to do with the family. The family has to instill in their kids visions, goals, college education. Because with education you get better jobs, more pay, more income which you can save a little or invest it more." (African American man)

"I have this picture of several men pushing this boat up the river and when I look at it, it says working poor. It is hard labor. They are doing this hard labor work and it appears that they are tired and they are wearied and they just probably don't make a lot of money." (African American woman)

"I have a good job and I make good money but it is never enough...So I have a picture of an elephant trying to balance himself... trying to balance a whole lot on something really small." (African American woman)

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"I picked a picture of food. The working poor are trying to put food on the table and pay the bills, medical bills and all of that." (Democratic woman)

"I chose this guy on top of all of these refrigerators. He is always going to the top, always striving for something more and how much does it take to make a person happy?" (Independent woman)

"I just put a stack of blankets...A lot of them are single moms and stuff. No matter what they do everything piles up. Their bills are piling up. If they are working at home, their laundry is piling up. They feel like they aren't taking care of their kids properly. They are not raising them. Someone else is, so it is just like the stack just keeps building. It is just more concern, more problems. They can't get ahead." (Republican woman)

"I picked a picture of Cheerio just because how often do these kids go to school hungry?" (Republican woman)

"This is a moose or a deer. I picked this one. She caught my eye as looking towards where she wants to be. Maybe she's looking at people who are middle class, a little bit better off than she is. It looks like she is thinking if I could just get past this hill. If I could just get past not having insurance. If I could just get a better place to live or more education so I could get a better job. It's like she's trying to get to a certain point but it looks very far away to her, very far to get to." (Republican woman)

"I picked this mother bird with the eggs because in my experiences people who are working poor are working very hard and especially for the children and to nurture them and bring them up to be better than what they have to put up with." (Senior man)

"Grapefruit. They are working poor. They are trying to get their family a little something beyond what the money will buy so they go out to Quigly and they get some grapefruit and stuff that they can get free. In other words, I picture this as free to go along with what little wages they might make." (Senior woman)

"I picked the picture of oatmeal...I said basic, good food that anybody that is poor and working would probably buy a big carton of oatmeal and feed that to their kids in the morning." (Senior woman)

"I picked for the working poor this pile of bills because I'm working and it looks like my house. Every time they allow two buckets of water, four more pour in." (Independent man)

"It's got an American flag and a Japanese flag and it makes me think that America always opens up for all the immigrants to come in to work hard and everything. A lot of them work for minimum wages and they all live together and then they get somewhere." (Independent man)

VIEWS OF WELFARE, EXPRESSED THROUGH PICTURES

Welfare as a Trap

"The reason I picked this picture of the quilt was because I guess everybody contributes to welfare. There is a lot of people stuck in it and they are a part of it in some ways inseparable. It takes a group effort also to try to maybe get rid of it." (Independent man)

"I picked this ship because to me welfare is a sinking ship. It's basically a temporary life trap. Anyone who falls in it sooner or later is going to drown. (African American man)

"I got a dog...People that are deprived or hopeless, just lay around and sleep and kind of hopeless feeling" (African American woman)

"I got this although it doesn't look like tenement houses or anything. It just kind of reminds me of . . . where everybody lives on top of another in big cities and that is what I think of people living on welfare. They never really get out." (Independent woman)

"I picked a path; a guy going down a path. It's a lot of people went on that same path and they just keep going and going and just never get off the path." (Independent woman)

"I have a little boy looking out the door. It looks sad and it looks like people who are on welfare would like to see the brighter side but they are kind of stuck and they can't get out of their situation." (Republican woman)

"My picture is someone with their feet tied. As I look at welfare it means something is holding you back." (African American woman)

"The reason I picked the spider, I just feel it is a big web where a lot of people are trapped in this web and they can't get out of this web. Then another reason is the venom or whatever in the spider, a lot of people are sucking the system dry." (Independent man)

Sympathetic Views

"Mine is a picture of a big, fat, piggybank. You are just kind of living—leftovers. It is such a small amount of money they give on a monthly basis." (African American woman)

"This one here with the cluttered toys and the police car. The first thing that came to mind was sometimes when you are deprived and your back is up against a wall, you get a lot of anxiety and stress and you start fighting among yourselves and among the community and that kind of thing. The police are involved a lot and then there is also a lot of clutter here where sometimes when you are depressed and you are down and out such as having a limited income you just kind of get hopeless and sloppy and nothing matters." (African American woman)

"Mine is a dog and the weather. The dog looks like he is hungry. He is sad. He needs some food." (African American woman)

"I have a rusted can. It reminds me of the poverty. It's been discarded and not needed. That is how some people are treated because they don't meet the standards that everybody thinks they should because they are on welfare." (Democratic woman)

"He has a backpack and money is falling out of it and the backpack has an American flag and he is running towards school. I thought it kind of related—a kid on welfare may not be able to even think about the possibility of going to get a higher education beyond high school." (Democratic woman)

"It seems like an average every day car and a lot of people on welfare, average every day people who have lost their jobs and they don't really look any different than anybody else but they are in a situation where they really need some help." (Independent woman)

"I have an old purse and there is no money in it. It is just empty. It is worn and it's been dragging on something." (Republican woman)

"I picked a man who looks like a hobo almost. He has his little hobo bag full of money standing alongside of the road. A welfare person would be on the side of the road wondering which way to go and always dreaming of that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." (Republican woman)

"I picked the sharks. I've never been on welfare but I can imagine it is pretty scary." (Republican woman)

"I assumed that this was a blanket, a comforter type thing and it sort of gives you a covering for welfare. It gives you covering and security." (Senior man)

Negative Views

"This is a lady with two poodles and they have bows in their hair and I think a lot of people on welfare have food stamps and they buy shrimp and they buy all the luxuries..." (Senior woman)

"My picture is a picture of food. I am thinking when you get the food stamps and don't use the money wisely." (African American woman)

"This is a picture of fish. There are three here and the baby and whichever parent—I don't want to say male or female—the other parent is going the other way. I really feel that a lot of people who are separated are on welfare because of that absent parent not helping them." (African American woman)

"To me that looks like a bunch of fragmented people who are not coordinated. They are just—they maybe have small groups but they are not working together for anything. They really have no real purpose. Welfare, to me, is existing. It is not creating." (Senior man)

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"I chose the car and the trailer. That one, in my work, I get sent into a lot of bad neighborhoods and it kind of irks me that I am out there busting my butt and there is so many people out there. I know welfare has helped a lot of people. I had my time where I was actually on food stamps but there is so many people out there abusing the system. I go into these neighborhoods and I see these people they are wearing nicer clothes than I am and they are not doing a damn thing for it. They are just sitting back and collecting it." (Independent man)

THE ISSUES—CRIME

First Words Used When Thinking of Crime		
Drugs	City, urban	Jail
Everywhere	Ghettos	Poor
Inner city	Innocent children	Punk
No color barrier	Robbery	Sad
Out of control	Shootings	Violence
Rampant	Anger	Youth
Suburbs, too	Gang banger	It is daily.
A drive by shooting	I think of teenagers,	It is constant.
Guns	not children.	Just getting younger
Carjacking	Inner city	and younger

"In the old days, kids were afraid of us. Now we're afraid of the kids." African American man.

People are feeling overwhelmed by crime and violence. They believe it is "rampant" and "everywhere" and "out of control." Though juvenile violent crimes are down, and the murder rate is at a 30 year low, focus group participants believe that "it is growing."

They see crime and violence reaching younger and younger youth. "Now you have kids who are in your elementary school who are going bad," an African American man stated. "They are bringing guns; they are dealing drugs." People feel both anger and sadness about juvenile crime. "If it involves kids it is so sad," a woman (Republican) said, "like little eight and nine year olds going out and shooting people."

While they have some hypotheses about what causes crime, most are at a loss. "It doesn't make any sense to me," noted a woman (Republican). "It is hard to comprehend—to decipher what makes people do what they do. What makes them pull out a gun and shoot somebody that they have never even met?"

Seniors, in particular, point to morals and television as the cause of children's decline. The problem stems from "mom and dad are too busy working to make ends meet," according to a senior woman. "If you look at the divorce rate and everything else," a woman (Republican) noted, "the values of the country have changed." "There is no guidance for the children from adults or people who should matter," suggested a senior man, "so they are learning out on the streets." "And that goes to welfare and everything else," stated a senior man. "You've got to have your self-respect or you are not going to respect anybody else." Nobody but the family can fix this problem, because the "school shouldn't be responsible for teaching what the parents should teach." (senior woman)

"I think the very first thing that needs to be done," noted a senior woman, "...get the movie producers to quit producing the garbage that they are putting out." Another added, "They are getting it from the movies. They are getting it from even the ads on TV for another thing coming in future programming. They are getting it from the streets and the newspaper articles that we see and hear. It is so all around us that these children are beginning to believe that this is a way of life. That if you want something, you go take it."

Community breakdown is also a cause of our problems, though it is not a cause people come to readily. One man (Independent) pointed to the projects as "like the roach motel. You check in but you don't usually check out...you treat people like animals and you house them like animals and you get animalistic results. That is why you have a lot of crime in the projects." But any neighborhood is susceptible because people no longer know their neighbors. "Years ago when I was a teenager growing up people didn't have as many cars and the stores weren't as big," noted a man (Independent). "They had small stores and day and night people walked the streets and sat on their front porches and everything. You didn't have the crime because there were people all around you. Nowadays, everybody hops in the car and runs to the store and the streets are empty." In short, we are having these problems because people "are inside watching TV on how terrible it is outside." (Independent man)

Finally, there is an underlying thread of individual choice. Even in adversity, children or teens do not have to "choose" crime. "I don't think you need to resort to that kind of violence," noted a woman (Independent). "There are other ways to work it, and I think it is just the easy way out." Another agreed, "Yeah, that they can't cut it in life so they just look for the easy way to get what they want and they don't have to work for it. They can take what they want." Another summarized, "just because monkey see, monkey doesn't have to do."

Crime cannot be prevented.

Most people reject the notion that crime can be prevented because the word "prevent" sounds like "eliminate." "No one is immune to something happening to them," stated a woman (Independent). "You can take every preventive caution or preventive measure in the world and you can still get your house broken into."

Some people believe that crime cannot be prevented because a person is born to commit crime. "Like a chemical imbalance or something," suggested a woman (Independent). "Sometimes it is a genetic thing," suggested another. "Because it is like a heredity factor from way back that maybe their grandfather was a criminal," suggested a senior woman, "or mother might have been a prostitute or whatever. It's a hand-me-down thing."

Others believe crime is part of the eternal struggle. "It is just part of the universe," professed an African American man. "It is part of the makeup of how things are. You have good, you have evil. It is just out there." "I think it is part of human nature," noted a woman (Republican).

They do believe crime can be reduced through good parenting. They have a more difficult time coming to systemic solutions for crime.

"Build character earlier in your child," suggested a senior woman, "and they know the difference between right and wrong and they will do the right thing."

A metaphor for crime helps people to understand that crime can be prevented. Participants most often create metaphors around illness. "I was thinking crime is like an illness," explained a man (Independent). "We know how to prevent it but you can't always do it and it is always going to come back no matter what you do." While this metaphor is natural for people, it also takes on a tone of inevitability, rather than active prevention. Another metaphor concerning neighborhoods being like a garden, with crime an invasive weed, causes people to feel more active responsibility to tend the garden and prevent the weeds. A woman (Independent) felt

crime could be prevented "because you can take steps that would make it less—like we're talking about the weed killer—less favorable for a weed to grow." "That is the key to it," a man (Independent) noted, "prevention rather than I think dealing with it after it is done."

"Crime is Like..." (in their own words)

"I was thinking crime is like an illness. We know how to prevent it but you can't always do it and it is always going to come back no matter what you do." (Independent man)

"It is like a cancer. It is invasive." (Independent man)

"Cancer. It keeps growing and it doesn't seem to die. And it affects all..." (Independent woman)

"Disease or a plague. Because it permeates all levels of society and all people everywhere." (Independent woman)

"Like cancer. It eats away at our society. Certain segments don't—because crime won't affect them. They don't see it until it is too late. They don't want to see it." (African American man)

"A burning building. Eventually, it destroys the whole building, the foundation and everything." (African American man)

"Crime is like the rap industry. It's like the NFL. Its got its few superstars and its got so many players on the fringes. So many people want to be the Michael Jordan. So many people want to be the Tupaq, so many people want to be Big Willy. This is the idol, the new role model that we have." (African American man)

"A cage. Because you are stuck in there and you are scared to go out. You don't want to venture out into the world. You stay locked up. All your doors are locked and everything at night. Make sure your chains are on, your windows are locked and sit in the corner." (Independent man)

"I kind of see it as the dinosaurs in the movie Jurassic Park. You are trying to get through life without anything happening to you. You keep trying to run past the carnivore. You are going to make a run for it and hope for the best. There is only so much you can do." (Independent man)

Even once they are convinced communities can be rebuilt to reduce crime, they have more difficulty imagining broad-based solutions. Having heard examples, they believe the actions of individuals in a community (whose responsibility it is) can make a difference in bringing a community back. They refer to neighborhood watch programs and will occasionally refer to "having places for kids to play" but cannot think of solutions beyond those. Further research efforts in this area should center on finding the systemic solutions that are compelling to people, so they refer to those solutions in the same way they now refer to job training and day care subsidies as solutions to poverty.

REBUILDING COMMUNITIES

What if I told you that crime is indeed preventable, and every juvenile crime expert in the country knows what needs to be done, but it is not easy. Research has consistently demonstrated that if communities are strong and tightly knit, juvenile crime rates drop dramatically. What we need to do is rebuild communities from within. Empower people to identify community issues, and work together to fix their own and their neighbors' problems. This builds a network of support for adults and children that prevents children from ever starting down a path of crime.

When people first hear this statement, their reaction is "wishful thinking," "sounds ideal," "like Utopia," or "asking for world peace." "It is asking 100 percent of people to get along 100 percent of the time," according to a woman (Republican). "That will never happen."

However, when people are reminded of situations in their own town when this kind of rebuilding has occurred, they become converts. "They marched through their neighborhoods and they stayed out and policed their neighborhood and they did drive off a lot of the crime," reminded a man (Independent). "It's the same thing in the paper here just recently," noted a senior man. "You've got a man in Mesa, one of the councilmen or alderman and he is doing that. They are going out and fixing up places for people to live, to better them. There is a woman in a neighborhood over here in Phoenix some place that I recall. She is an impetus to get people involved in the community, to get the drug dealers out of the area."

Armed with a true-life story, most come to believe this kind of action could work to rebuild communities, but they wonder where the criminals will go. "Where do they go?" a woman (Independent) asked. "You throw them out of your neighborhood. Where are they going to go?" "My first reaction is they must have gone somewhere else," stated a woman (Republican). "That is true," added another. "They are like cockroaches." The assumption is that at a certain point, a person's life cannot be turned around. According to one woman (Republican), before the worst communities can be improved, "I think you would have to move all of those people who are not correctable away."

Police officers are very credible spokespeople.

Initially, people react to the set up quote as "bullshit" because they assume it is coming from a politician or a person who is not close to the situation. One African American man believed the author of the quote was "somebody that is obviously not living in the inner city that is living out maybe in a suburban type area where maybe it is a little bit more controlled." A man (Independent) assumes it is "somebody who is rich and has never lived in the situation."

Most assume this quote would come from a politician, "around election time." "It sounded more like an alderman or some kind of politician that would say that," suggested a man (Independent). This is problematic because they "wouldn't believe a lot of politicians, to be honest with you." (Independent man)

A children's advocate as the author is "expected," according to a woman (Independent). "They are supposed to have a positive outlook on everything." Counselors, clergy, and teachers are also believable, but expected, spokespeople for this quote. The most powerful author is a police officer. According to one African American man, a police officer who would say this "is trying to motivate the people in the neighborhood to rise up and take back their neighborhood." One retired police officer recommended that a police officer is a more believable spokesperson because, "usually the police chief out here doesn't mean that you are the best policeman in town. It means you are politically connected." Another Independent man added, "He doesn't get out in the neighborhood; he is sitting behind a desk."

MOTIVATED TO ACTION

Overall, about half the focus group participants say they are motivated to take some kind of action on behalf of kids. Women and those with young children at home seem more willing to act than others. However, even though about half voice personal motivation, their body language indicates they are unlikely to do much.

Many feel one is more likely to act on behalf of kids if they have young children. "You would have to have children in order to do some action," noted an African American woman. A father of a one year old daughter indicated he would be likely to get involved "when she is older and she starts getting involved in sports...But now with my own, I'm kind of locked in with her for the next few years until she is old enough."

People have to be at the right time in their lives to be interested. "I have to be really honest," an older woman (Republican) stated, "I'm at the time that if this was about old people, you wouldn't be able to shut me up...I just took my mother out of the hospital three weeks ago."

Some look to their grandchildren as a link. An African American man intended to "be more of a caring grandfather who wants their grandchild to be the best that they can be." However, most older people were more of the mindset that "for 27 and a half years I've been doing stuff. I'm tired of it."

The seniors were not even willing to say they would favor a children's candidate. "That is only a piece of the puzzle when you decide who you are going to vote for," according to a senior man. A senior woman added, "No, no. I wouldn't vote for her or any other politician solely based on a children's program."

Those who are willing to act, are really only willing to act in their own community.

"It makes me want to go to the civic association in my neighborhood and say, 'quit worrying about the stupid covenants and start worrying about is the playground clean,'" argued a woman (Democrat).

There are two reasons why people focus on their own community. First, according to a woman (Independent), "we're so busy nowadays that you really take care of your own first." Second, people want to have the communities of their childhood, so if they are going to get involved anywhere, it is going to be where they can build neighborly relationships. "That is the way it used to be years ago," suggested a woman (Independent). "Every mom on the block was home and one of the moms would take in all the kids and let them play at her house for awhile and then they would go by somebody else's house or whatever and it was always like, 'oh, stay for dinner.'"

This desire for community may be a way to involve people who are centered on their own lives. For example, one woman (Democrat) admitted, "I am selfish and I want to spend time with my own children... We need to spend time with our children. We need to stay home with our children." While this person would not volunteer in rebuilding a community across town, she is a prime candidate for making her own community kid-friendly, if she thinks of this as getting involved in her community, rather than volunteering for kids.

While a community focus may help to involve those who want more community, this same focus allows many to determine there is no reason for their involvement, if there is no problem in their community. "How can you deal with something that doesn't exist?" asked a man (Independent). Another added, "I can't think right now of an opportunity in my neighborhood that needs me." "I'm not living in the ghetto," suggested a third.

Some say they are energized to act but do not know how to start. "It is fine to all sit here and say, well I would go do something about it," stated a woman (Democrat). "Where do you go? Who do you see about it?" However, most feel they have resources, at least to find out about volunteering. "There's a lot of articles and especially in the church papers they are always asking do you have a little time to teach in the school, CCD or even the libraries," suggested a woman (Independent). "There is all kinds of possibilities out there. You could be busy all the time." "There is always something in the newspaper," suggested a woman (Republican). "If you want to get involved, there is a million ways to get involved in this town."

"Get involved" means "volunteer" to most people, and that seems like too much involvement.

"A lot of volunteer things I've seen want to lock you into this huge, long commitment that I'm not sure I could keep," complained a woman (Independent). "They want months and months and months." They tended to gravitate toward activities that would be "a short-term commitment for a long-term positive" (Independent woman).

The real problem, however, is that people feel unable to make a difference. "I do feel so apathetic right now because you were saying about writing a letter and we all should," complained a woman (Republican). "They always say, 'write your congressman, write your congressman.' I don't. Maybe if we all did about healthcare, it would make a difference because whoever yells the loudest that is usually what they listen to. I feel like I'm a hypocrite really. I am apathetic at this point because I've seen so many things that were supposed to happen that didn't. That is no excuse."

People have to see a specific need and have a personal connection.

To be willing to take their own personal initiative to create solutions, "we have to be threatened," according to a woman (Independent). "You have to see the need rather than far away," added another. Otherwise, people do not have the time or inclination to develop their own path. "I don't really think we have the time... to do the research," a woman (Republican) expressed. "Give me something and tell me to go do it."

Organizing through places of worship or other already established networks of people makes it easier for people to get involved. "If you get a group of friends together to go. I would probably try to do something like that," noted a woman (Republican). Another explained, "if you have a network of people, or two or three even, that you know, you are kind of more in a comfort zone. I also think you are more apt to do a better job because you are going to be upbeat."

THEME

When asked why children should be a priority, people tend to answer one of two ways: (1) children are our future, and (2) compassion for the innocent.

In every discussion, people respond quite simply to the question of why children's concerns are important. "Our children are our future," replied an African American man. "The future of what is going on today is in the hands of the children." "The future of children is important to all of us because...they are the people who someday teach your children or your grandchildren...They are the people that provide your day to day life and

services, noted a woman (Democrat). "Even though I don't have any children," suggested a woman (Independent), "They are our future. They are what the world becomes tomorrow." A senior man explained that if children are not "fed well and if they are not healthy, they are not going to learn. Therefore, they will not develop into responsible adults being able to then give to the society as a whole and become a good member of the society. Then you are going to have more prisons or more homeless shelters or whatever because they never developed."

"Life is all about kids it seems and you've got to be concerned," noted a man (Independent). Another added that it is a "big world and you are kind of scared for them." "I want them to be safe," a woman (Republican) pleaded. "I don't want them to have to go through all of this. I don't want when my daughter is 18 years old to be driving down the street and get shot by a drive by shooting."

A number of specific themes were tested. These themes are indicated in italic as read to the focus group participants.

People have a strong desire for the neighborhoods they remember as children, but fear those neighborhoods cannot exist today.

When we were growing up we knew every person in the neighborhood, and any one of them would take the time to help if you needed it, or tell your mom what you were up to if you needed that. It is time that we reached out to each other and had that type of community again. A place where we have places for kids to hang out, and people who have time for them. A place where we all share responsibility for each other and rebuild the playground, take a neighbor child to a basketball game, and fight for after school programs. We need to make communities work for kids.

Focus group participants rate the above statement highest of the statements tested. They have a strong desire for the communities they remember as children, which is why this phrase is so powerful for them. "It was just the way it was best," noted a woman (Independent). "It seemed to be the best in our society." Another added, "It worked back then." "When I grew up," remembered an African American man, "you couldn't go too far without Mrs. Jenkins or Mrs. Jones saying, boy, why are you picking up that cigarette butt?' Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Jenkins had a right to address you."

Though this is the kind of community people want, they believe it is impossible to recreate for several reasons. A woman (Independent) asked the central question for many, "We would all like it to be that way, but is it going to be that way? There is a big difference." "It is nostalgic but it is not realistic," a woman (Democrat) noted. "It ain't the way we live anymore," a woman (Independent) warned, "and it ain't going to go back that way. I don't feel that it is ever going to be the way it is again."

Many suggest that the primary reason this type of community does not exist is because mothers are no longer at home. "When we grew up...our mothers were home," a woman (Democrat) suggested. "You could walk in the door and say, 'ma, I'm home.' There was an adult there. I think we felt safe." Another remembered, "There was at least three neighbors where we knew we had to go if nobody was home. We'd go there for a snack or whatever and it was just understood...There was a lady, Mrs. Pitney. I will never forget her and she was the older lady in the neighborhood. And we all knew we could go into her house; she was home and we went to her house and she would read us something."

There was an element of safety that is missing today. "The door was never locked ... We walked to school and we walked home from school" (Democratic woman). Another noted that "today you can't leave the little ones out by themselves like our parents did."

Most importantly, people do not have the kind of relationships with neighbors that allow them to interact with children in a disciplinary or quasi parental role if those children are not their own. One African American man stated that even though older people are home during the day, they are afraid to watch over children's behavior because "if they spank little kids who are in the sixth and seventh grade are [they] going to pull out a gun or try to stab them in the back?" Many believe that other parents do not want neighbors to have this level of involvement with their children. "Nowadays people think you are a buttinsky," according to a woman (Independent). "You try to tell them something about their kid or what to do or whatever," another added. "They resent any input."

Additionally, people believe our society has lost the level of respect parents used to have. "You have so many younger parents who don't respect their own parents, that talk back to their own parents," noted an African American man. "So it is kind of hard if you are 9 or 10 years old and you see your 20 year old or 21 year old mother or whatever disrespect her mother. Then it is going to be hard for you to respect. So therefore the grandmother cannot talk to the younger kids."

The new millennium offers an opportunity to remind people to look at the status of children entering the new century, and to determine if it is the future we want for them.

We are about to enter a new century, and we have to ask ourselves if we are really leaving the world a better place for our children? The children of today will be running the country tomorrow. We need to make sure they have good health, a solid education, and a willingness to be a good citizen. We need to nurture them now, and work to leave this world better than it is right now. Children are the future.

This message is the second most popular theme of those tested, but it is actually the strongest overall since there is no perceived downside to this statement. It is strong for people because it taps one of the main reasons they have for caring about what happens to children. "Because it is true that the children of today will be running the country tomorrow," according to a woman (Independent). "We're going to turn a new century," stated a woman (Republican), "we've got to do something. And it talked about not just education and schools and health and insurance. To be a better person—I think that is what it is about."

The theme works not just for bringing attention to children's problems, but also for bringing attention to society's problems by asking people to think about the kind of society we want for children. It allows for a positive look forward, instead of a nostalgic look backward or a hopeless look at today. "We can't improve the world if we don't improve the children now," noted a senior woman. "We talked about breaking the cycle before, about starting with children," a woman (Republican) stated. "I think that is the first thing that came to my mind."

Interestingly, even with voters' cynicism of politics, they respond to the concept of citizenship. "I love the part where it said, 'willing to be a good citizen,'" noted a woman (Republican).

As in past research, the investment message continues to be strong. People want to fix problems before they occur, particularly when it concerns children.

If we would invest more in preventing problems before they happen, we would all save in the long run. Spending resources in immunizations, and basic healthcare will uncover problems before they become costly to fix. A few dollars in after school programs, a solid education, and safe streets, is a lot cheaper than building more prisons and locking children up for their entire lives. Invest now, because children are the bottom line.

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This message makes simple common sense for people. "That makes total sense," an African American man commented. "It is something I think is very true but unfortunately the resources aren't there at the beginning."

"Because it just makes sense," agreed a woman (Independent). "If you see a problem, you have to work at how do we prevent this problem so that in the long run we solve the problem." "By starting when they are kids," suggested a woman (Republican), "and giving them a good education, give them good health, would prevent them maybe from going on welfare later, which is going to cost us more in tax dollars than it is to put out some dollars now." "It is a sensible thing to take care of the little problems before they get big and they will never get big," according to a senior woman.

This path seems doable, even for problems that appear overwhelming. "Because when you look at it from the perspective of getting it early," noted a woman (Republican), "you see there is hope. But once it is already blown out of proportion and it is so bad, you get discouraged." Another added, "When things get out of control, they are out of control. You've got to nip things in the bud."

Though children's issues have entered the political arena, people are not yet ready to believe children's fate is so strongly determined by the actions of politicians.

For too long politicians have avoided responsibility for children and gotten away with a children's agenda that consisted of just putting cute children in their campaign ads. Children deserve to be in classrooms that are not overcrowded, every child should have affordable health insurance, and children of the working poor shouldn't be left to fend for themselves after school just because their parents can't afford after school programs. It is time we asked politicians, "who's for kids and who's just kidding?"

On the one hand, people are attracted to "when it says, 'children deserve,'" a woman (Independent) pointed out. "They do. Those are things that are important." However, they feel the emphasis on politicians' responsibility is placing all the blame in the wrong place.

A man (Independent) focused on the phrase "For too long politicians have avoided," and pointed out that the problem is focused on the wrong group. "Not politicians- 'too long parents.'" "We're trying to blame society's woes on government and it starts in the home," suggested another man (Independent).

Reminding people of the problems facing children simply adds to their hopelessness. Additionally, while people want to help children, they are nervous about reaching outside of their own family and existing networks.

We can all point to a lot of problems that are having an influence on the values of our youth. Some parents aren't doing a good job, the media is poisoning our youth with violence, and there are no good role models for children to look up to today. Every one of us needs to reach out to as many children as we can to instill the values they need to have. We all need to take this responsibility to hold the fabric of our society together. Kids can't wait while adults debate.

The phrase "kids can't wait while adults debate" powerfully expresses participants' personal sense of urgency about the problems. However, as an overall theme, it simply adds to the hopelessness and negativity they already feel. "It's a negative ad," noted a woman (Independent). Another pointed to the phrase "'No good role models.' I don't like poisoning."

Though people want the community of the 1950s, they are not willing to step outside their own families to fill that role. Stressing that each of us is responsible for today's youth is interpreted as blame instead of empowerment.

As children get older, it is harder and harder to protect them from the influences of the world. The only way to keep your own child safe is to get involved with other children and have a say in how they are raised, educated, and kept safe from drugs and alcohol. Knowing the children throughout your community and town, and taking personal responsibility to work to make them all good adults, will make the community a better place to live, and help your own child be a better person. They are all our children.

While the prior message about community is received positively by focus group participants, this message is not. According to a woman (Independent) the former message "has more of 'you are helping a community. We are helping each other. We're all working together.' This one here is 'look, it is your fault.'"

Some are attracted to this message because it stresses that "parents need to get involved" (Independent man). However, others believe it is too much to ask for a parent to be a parent to others' children. "It is enough taking care of your own than having to take care of somebody else's kids," noted a woman (Independent).

This message feels like blame, like someone "is foisting this on to you. 'Well, it's your fault. It's your job," complained a woman (Independent).

More than the other messages, this theme seems to be asking people to take on a role that is no longer appropriate today. According to a woman (Republican), "It used to be where . . . parents interacted. 'Oh my gosh, I've seen your kid playing hookey today' or whatever. Now it is like a lot of parents are very offended. 'Are you accusing my child of something?'" Another added, "people are taking it now as a personal thing. Like I'm saying your judgment is not good."

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the findings of seven focus groups conducted in three cities. Each focus group consisted of 8-10 respondents and was held in a professional focus group facility, moderated by a trained moderator. All respondents were recruited to meet the following criteria:

- Mix of age between 25 and 65 (except seniors group, retired, 55-75 years old)
- Mix of education
- One-half with children 18 years old or younger, one-quarter with no children, one-quarter with children over 18 years old (except for seniors group)
- Voted in the most recent general election, plan to vote in the next
- No conflicting employment (marketing, child advocacy, teachers, etc.)
- Party affiliation:
  - Independents—Independent, no lean toward a party
  - Democratic—Lean or weak affiliation, no strong party identifiers
  - GOP—Lean or weak affiliation, no strong party identifiers
- Seniors—Mix of Independent, lean/weak Democrat, lean/weak GOP
- African American—no strong Democrats

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The groups were held on the following dates:

Baltimore, MD	September 9, 1998	Democratic Women African American women, mixed party
Phoenix, AZ	September 19, 1998	Seniors Mixed GOP Women
Chicago, IL	October 14, 1998	Independent Women Independent Men African American men, mixed party

Focus groups are useful to understand the ways in which people think through issues, and to hear the language people use. The results are not quantifiable or projectable to a larger population.

THE INFLUENCE OF LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS FRAMES ON ATTITUDES ABOUT CHILDCARE

by Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr., Ph.D.

Drastic changes in American lifestyles have called into question the future of America"s children. For instance, the lack of kinship networks—a product of urbanization and increased individual mobility—limits the traditional child-rearing functions performed by members of the extended family. Rising divorce rates and an increase in "out-of-wedlock" births produce more single-parent households. And as more women enter the workforce—particularly outside of the home—the role of women in the family is at odds with the historical pattern of men being the primary "bread-winners" and women taking care of the home and the family. The net result is that finding suitable childcare services has become a central feature of American family life.

This claim is nicely supported by a number of national public opinion polls. A recent Harris survey found that 55 percent of those surveyed believed it was "extremely" or "very" difficult to "find affordable high-quality childcare." And over one-half of the respondents said that a lack of acceptable childcare reduced their job performance (Taylor, 1998). Likewise, a national opinion survey sponsored by *Reader's Digest* reports that 68 percent of adult respondents think that the availability of good day care is "very" or "fairly" important to them (Institute for Social Inquiry, 1996). In short, cost-effective high quality childcare is important to the American public.

Advocates, however, have found tough sledding in their efforts to get the country to act on behalf of children. Large-scale advocacy efforts, such as those proposed by the Children's Defense Fund have met with little apparent interest (National Commission on Children, 1991; Takanishi, 1998). While there have been obvious success stories—Head Start and school lunches quickly come to mind—they are dwarfed by a dominant paradigm that demonizes America's youth (Males, 1995). Television is among the chief purveyors of this imagery. On an almost nightly basis, the news airs stories about troubled "superpredators" (Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez, and Wallack, 1997). The consequence of this type of coverage, according to media effects research, is that exposure to teen crime (particularly minority crime) increases public support for the most punitive public policies (Gilliam and Iyengar, forthcoming). Even in cases where the dominant paradigm about kids is not invoked, stories about issues such as childcare often rely on simplistic story lines. A common example includes news segments dealing with "day care horror stories." This frame depicts childcare as simply a matter of finding a secure place to keep the kids during the workday. It says little about the possibility that childcare enhances children is development or improves adult job performance. In all, this raises an important question—what role does the media play in the public's understanding of the childcare issues? Answering this question is the primary focus of our report.

The remainder of this report is broken down into four sections. In the first section, the influence of television news on the viewing public is explored. Particularly relevant is the significance of "framing" as a news tool. The second section details an experimental design that allows a discrete assessment of the impact of various news frames on attitudes about childcare. The third section presents the results from the empirical work. The final section considers the implications of the findings and their connection to future communications strategies employed by children's advocates. In addition to the author, Jessica Hausman, Pam Singh and David Willis contributed to the research.

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SECTION 1—THE POWER OF TELEVISION NEWS FRAMES

There is little doubt that television plays an important role in the lives of most Americans. The research literature indicates that the news has the power to set public agendas, direct attention to particular issues, and, ultimately, influence how we think about those issues (Lippmann, 1922; see, also Iyengar and Reeves, 1997). In short, television is an important link between citizens and their government. And local television news—whether measured as audience share, advertising revenues, or hours of programming—is now the public's primary source of public affairs information (Hess, 1991; Papper and Gerhard, 1997; Roper-Starch, 1994).

In this report, the impact of media framing is of particular interest. That is, the media practice of constructing news stories in ways that call attention to particular aspects of an issue. A plethora of studies confirms that how the media covers a given subject has a significant impact on the public's understanding of that subject (see, Gitlin, 1980; Iyengar, 1991). The basic dynamic is that the included elements constitute a frame of reference for comprehending a particular story or topic. Moreover, what is excluded from the frame also carries significance because it narrows the range of salient and pertinent information. Media scholars have identified two basic types of framing— (1) episodic and (2) thematic. Episodic news frames concentrate on particular events involving specific acts and actors. Little effort is made to connect the elements of the specific instance to any broader set of concerns. Most television news stories about (violent) crime are prototypical examples of episodic frame—a single crime, a single perpetrator, a single place and time (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, and Wright, 1996; Gilliam and Iyengar, 1997). On the other hand, thematic news frames present a much broader picture by incorporating contextual elements into the story. Going back to our crime example, thematic coverage might focus on the availability of guns in a particular neighborhood, the area's history of violence, the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, or the unemployment rates in the surrounding communities. The nature of the news frame, therefore, can measurably influence the way that people come to understand an issue.[1]

With regards to the media, most children's advocates have focused their attention on the impact of commercial programming on America's youth (Children Now, 1998; Kunkel, 1994). While these efforts are noteworthy, they leave an important issue unresolved. Namely, the impact of news programming on adult attitudes about children's issues. In other words, the focus on entertainment has concealed the consequential effect of television news on public perceptions. Moreover, it has neglected the importance of adult attitudes to the public debate about kids. The underlying purpose of this report is to marry a focus on the power of television news programming to the dynamics of public opinion on children's issues.

SECTION 2—METHOD

A novel experimental technique is employed to assess the impact of childcare news frames on the viewing public. The experiments in this study were designed so that the only differences between any two groups of viewers concerned the particular news frame to which they were exposed. Four levels of the manipulation were established. In the first level, participants watched a news story depicting childcare as the responsibility of employers. Subjects viewed a segment about a company that provides subsidized, on-site day care services for their employees. In the second level, some participants watched a story featuring early childhood as the most important point in human development.

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The story highlighted a woman who is a mother and an elementary school teacher. While interacting with her child at a day care center, she remarks about the importance of the early years to the performance of school-age children. In the third level, a third set of participants watched another story about childcare that depicted the issue as a simple matter of finding safe places to keep children during work hours. The story featured a government inspector and a basic checklist telling parents to look for such things as a posted license and clean facilities.[2] Finally, in the fourth level, the control group did not view a childcare story. Participants watched an 11 minute videotaped newscast (including commercials) described as having been selected at random from news programs broadcast during the past week. Depending upon the condition to which participants were randomly assigned, they watched a news story on childcare (approximately 45 seconds). The report on childcare was inserted into the middle position of the newscast following the first commercial break. The three childcare frames are transcribed on page 73.

The study was administered at a major shopping mall in Los Angeles. Upon their arrival, participants were given instructions and completed a short pre-test questionnaire concerning their social background, political ideology, level of interest in political affairs, and media habits. Participants then watched the videotape of the newscast. At the end of the videotape, participants completed a lengthy questionnaire probing their political and social views. After completing the questionnaire, subjects were debriefed in full (including a full explanation of the experimental procedures) and were paid the sum of $15.

SECTION 3—ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The post-test questionnaire explored respondents' attitudes on a wide range of issues related to childcare. Four sets of items were examined in this analysis. The first set focused on a battery of questions about the saliency of various issues, including the well being of children. The second set focused on basic questions of attribution of responsibility. The third set concentrated on policies, programs, and spending patterns of the public sector. The fourth set looked at the related issue of the role of women in family life.

Two specifications were performed in the analysis.[3] At the broadest level, a comparison was made between the control condition and seeing any news story about childcare. This indicated whether or not exposure to the "average" news story influenced people's attitudes above and beyond the control group. The analysis was further refined to permit a more stringent test of each individual news story. During this phase, the comparison was made between the mean of a given condition versus the average mean of the other three conditions (including the control mean). This gave the independent effect of each news condition—from both the other news stories and the control condition.[4] By doing this, researchers were in a position to examine the joint and independent effects of childcare news frames on public opinion.[5]

Table 1 presents the impact of childcare news frames on attitudes about the saliency of children's issues. Respondents were presented with a list of five social issues and asked to rate them in terms of "how important that issue is to you personally." The issues were (1) the needs of children, (2) early childhood education, (3) crime and violence, (4) drugs and alcohol abuse, and the (5) environment. The basic expectation was that exposure to any of the childcare stories should heighten the saliency of the two items related to children's issues. In addition, exposure to the early childhood development frame was expected to be particularly important to attitudes about early childhood education. The findings indicate mixed results. Watching the "employer responsibility" news story

increased the number of adults who cited the needs of children as an important issue by 7 percentage points ($p < .05$). On the other hand, exposure to the early childhood development frame actually decreased the salience of children's issues ($p < .10$). In addition, the three news frames did not have the anticipated impact on the importance of early childhood education. Finally, and unexpectedly, exposure to any childcare news frame decreased crime and violence as an important issue by about 18%. Seeing the "employer responsibility" story had the most dramatic effect ($p < .05$). In sum, exposure to childcare news coverage has a modest effect on the salience of children's issues. Perhaps the most interesting result is that exposure to childcare news stories lessens concern about crime and violence. It is as if the public believes that any program that keeps kids off the street will lower the crime rate.

Table 1. Importance of Children's Issues

% Saying Issue is Extremely or Very Important	Grand Mean	Control Condition	Early Childhood Development	Employer Responsibility	Government Regulation
Needs of children	49	48	43*	56*	50
Early Childhood Education	45	48	41	44	46
Drug Use and Alcohol Abuse	33	35	31	35	31
Crime and Violence	46	59**	45	38**	42
Environment	42	44	41	48	35*

(N=199) Note: **p<.05; *p<.10

On the other hand, exposure to the childcare news frames had little effect on the perception that early childhood education was important (if anything the stories actually reduce support for early education). Unexpectedly, but perhaps most interesting, exposure to any news frame decreased crime and violence as an important issue by an average of approximately 18 percent. Exposure to the "employer responsibility" condition reduced the saliency of crime even further. This is particularly noteworthy given that the news frames did little to change attitudes about drugs or the environment. It would appear that exposure to childcare news frames has a modest impact on the saliency of children's issues. Less expected, however, was the finding that exposure to childcare news stories lessens the importance of crime and violence. It as if the public believes that any program that keep kids off the streets lowers the crime rate.

Tables 2 and 3 focus on the impact of news frames on attitudes about childcare. In particular, Table 2 addresses responsibility for access to childcare, while Table 3 focuses on childcare options. With these responses, three main hypotheses were tested. First, because much of early childhood is spent with the family (as opposed to the schools),

It was expected that exposure to the story about early human development should increase the proportion of subjects citing the family as the primary institution to ensure access to childcare. Second, exposure to the employer responsibility frame should increase the number of people preferring that option. And third, subjects viewing the story about finding a safe place to put children should favor the government as primarily responsible for childcare (recall that the story featured a state inspector and talked about licensing).

Table 2: Responsibility for Access to Childcare

Who's Responsible?	Grand Mean	Control Condition	Early Childhood Development	Employer Responsibility	Government Regulation
Family	42	37	49**	48	35*
Employer	19	17	14*	27**	19
Government	26	33**	24	14**	31*

(N=199) Note: **p<.05; *p<.10

Table 2 reflects the percentage of subjects citing the family, employers, or government as primarily responsible for access to childcare.[6] Findings generally met the researchers expectations. Exposure to the early childhood news frame increased the percentage of people who indicated that the family is responsible by an average of 10 percent over the average of the other conditions (and 12 percent over the control group). Similarly, exposure to the employer responsibility frame increased, by approximately 10 percent, over the average of the other three means. And while watching the government regulation story did not increase the number of people citing the government when compared to the control group, it did produce much higher percentages than the other two news frames. In summary, exposure to the three stories about childcare changed opinions about attribution of responsibility.

Subjects were asked to rank three childcare options—(1) flexible employers, (2) trained teachers, and (3) caring adults—in terms of what was most important to them. In addition, they were asked if they would be willing to pay $100 more per year to support the option they ranked as most important.[7] These questions were asked relative to two scenarios—(1) whether children are under three years of age or, alternatively, (2) between 3-5 years of age. Expectations remain the same: caring adults represent family; flexible employers indicate employer responsibility; and "trained teachers" and "tax increase" suggest government involvement.

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Table 3. What is the Most Important Child Care Option?					
% of People who Rank Option #1	Grand Mean	Control Condition	Early Childhood Development	Employer Responsibility	Government Regulation
If Child is under 3 years old					
Caring Adults	33	27*	39*	31	33
Flexible Employer	58	62	55	65*	50*
Trained Teachers	32	35	31	29	31
Percent Favoring Tax Increase	63	60	61	63	71**
If Child is 3-5 years old					
Caring Adults	29	23*	37**	25	31
Flexible Employer	40	35	35	50**	40
Trained Teachers	48	54*	47	49	42
Percent Favoring Tax Increase	63	60	59	67	69

(N=199) Note: **p<.05; *p<.10

Table 3 presents the percentage of people who rank the option most important and the percentage of people who would pay a tax increase.[8] Once again, the basic hypotheses are supported by the data. Regardless of the age of the child, exposure to the early childhood frame raises support for "caring adults" as the most important childcare option (by about 10 percentage points). Likewise, exposure to the employer responsibility frame increases support for that option by up to 14 percent (in the case of children 3-5 years of age). Finally, although exposure to the government regulation frame did not increase the number of people choosing "trained teachers" as the most important option, exposure to this frame did increase a willingness to pay a tax increase. Apparently, people's attitudes about childcare policy options are influenced by how the issue is framed.

Tables 4 and 5 focus on the role of government in providing for children and families. Subjects were asked to rate the effectiveness of several programmatic options that might possibly be undertaken by the federal government.[9] The options were: (1) providing tax credits to parents, (2) providing tax credits to businesses, (3) requiring employers to allow leave from work to care for a new baby, (4) requiring employers to allow leave from work to care for a sick child, and (5) subsidizing childcare for poor mothers who leave welfare to work.

Table 4. Actions Federal Government Could Take to Strengthen Families

% Saying Action Would be Extremely or Very Effective	Grand Mean	Control Condition	Early Childhood Development	Employer Responsibility	Government Regulation
Providing Tax Credits to Parents	60	60	57	65	60
Providing Tax Credits to Business	51	42**	51	56	54
Requiring that Employers Allow Leave from Work to Care for New Baby	66	65	69	67	65
Requiring that Employers Allow Leave from Work to Care for a Sick Child	66	73*	59*	73*	59*
Subsidizing Childcare for Poor Mothers Who Leave Welfare to Work	74	69	71	77	81**

(N=199) Note: **p<.05; *p<.10

Researchers expected that exposure to the early childhood frame should increase support for tax credits to parents (the family); exposure to the employer responsibility frame should increase support for tax credits to businesses and the requirement of employers to allow leave from work to deal with the health of the children (employer responsibility); and exposure to the government regulation frame should give the greatest boost to subsidized care for poor mothers who leave welfare to work (government).

Table 4 indicates the impact of childcare news frames on attitudes about the effectiveness of various governmental actions. It is worth mentioning that the most preferred option is subsidized childcare for mothers who leave welfare to work. The least favored option is for providing tax credits to businesses. Between one-half and three-quarters of the sample supported some type of government intervention.

This portion of the analysis presents more modest results. Exposure to the early childhood development story, for example, did not increase support for tax credits to parents. While the employer responsibility frame fared a little better, it only has a significant effect on

requiring employers to allow work leave to care for a sick child (although it is in the right direction for the other two items). On the other hand, watching the news story about finding a safe place to keep children during the day (government regulation) did significantly boost support for a program of subsidies for mothers who leave welfare to work. And finally, it is noticeable that exposure to any news segment on childcare increased the percentage of people who favor providing tax credits for businesses. The perceived effectiveness of different programs, it seems, is not wholly dependent on how news stories are framed.

Table 5. Support for Social Welfare Spending on Children's Programs

% Who Agree or Strongly Agree	Grand Mean	Control Condition	Early Childhood Development	Employer Responsibility	Government Regulation
Health Care for Children whose Families don't have Insurance	79	73*	75	88**	83
HEADSTART for Poor Children	82	67**	84	89**	88*
Housing for Poor Families with Children	74	71	69	81*	77
Food Stamps for Poor Children and Families	80	81*	75	92**	73

(N=199)

Note: **p<.05; *p<.10

Another way to elicit attitudes about policy is to tie specific policy proposals to levels of government spending. In other words, perceived programmatic effectiveness may be a vague measure by which to judge policy preferences. Table 5 presents data on the impact of childcare news frames on the percentage of people who support social welfare spending on four children's programs.[10] Given that the programs listed represent government action, researchers expected that exposure to the government regulation frame would produce the greatest increase in support for higher levels of spending. In general, this hypothesis is supported—exposure increases calls for higher spending in three of the four cells, two of which are significantly different from the control group. But the data also reveal an unanticipated result. Namely, that exposure to the employer responsibility frame had a large effect on attitudes about spending on children's programs. The most notable instances were the effects for food stamps (an average increase of 16 percent over the other three means) and Headstart (+9 percent). Thus not only did the frame that invoked the government (government regulation) increase support for spending, but the employer responsibility story also led subjects to support higher levels of governmental outlays.

Table 6 presents responses to questions about an issue related to childcare: the role of women in the family. As noted above, the exodus of women from the home to the workplace is one of the prime factors for changes in American family life. This trend has called into question traditional gender roles and has fueled a great deal of public discussion. Researchers expected that exposure to the early childhood development frame, with its implicit attention to family matters, would produce more progressive attitudes about the role of women in the family.

Table 6. Role of Women

% Who Agree or Strongly Agree	Grand Mean	Control Condition	Early Childhood Development	Employer Responsibility	Government Regulation
Working Mother can Establish Warm Relationship with Children	57	64*	47**	54	63*
Less Important for a Wife to Help Husband's Career than her Own	76	67*	71	77	90**
Pre-school Children do not Suffer if Mother Works	43	44	45	42	42
It is not Necessary for the Man to be the Achiever Outside the Home	62	64	59	54*	73**

(N=199)

Note: **p<.05; *p<.10

Table 6 also reports the impact of childcare news frames on the percentage of people who hold progressive attitudes about the role of women.[8] This hypothesis was not supported. Exposure to the early childhood development frame did not promote progressive attitudes about the role of women. On the other hand, watching the story about finding a secure place to keep children significantly influenced attitudes about the role of women. In the most extreme case, exposure to this story increased support for women by 23 percent over the control condition and 14 percent over the composite mean (of the other three conditions). There is at least one plausible explanation for this finding. Because much of the responsibility for securing childcare falls on working women, it is possible that the concerns about licensing and regulation raised in the story invoked empathy. That is, people may have felt that, given the precarious state of childcare services, having to navigate this uncertain terrain is a thankless task. In response, therefore, the public held less harsh attitudes about the role of women in the family.

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In conclusion, in some instances exposure to any news story about childcare increased the public's willingness to act on behalf of children. However, these effects were scattered and weak. More to the point, the evidence suggests that how the story is framed makes a great deal of difference for public understanding of the childcare issue. Perhaps the strongest and most consistent finding was that exposure to the employer responsibility frame not only increased support for the role of employers but also increased the saliency of childcare and increased spending on childcare programs. Moreover, exposure to this frame also decreased the saliency of crime and violence as an important social issue.

SECTION 4—CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is little doubt that America's children are in a precarious state. While it is easy to overstate the case (see, Males, 1995), it is equally important to understand that there are troubling warning signs on the horizon. Rising poverty, infant mortality, and juvenile arrests for violent crimes are typically cited as important indicators. Against this backdrop, children's advocates have struggled to move adult opinion in a way that encourages public willingness to act on behalf of children. Part of the problem has to do with the public's perception of young people. A recent national poll conducted by Public Agenda found that significant numbers of adults think today's youth are "rude," "irresponsible," and "wild." This imagery is in no small measured fueled by regular media accounts of violent, anti-social youths. This is important because public opinion is shaped as much by news images planted in our heads as it is by real-life experiences.

How the news is told is just as important as what is told. These effects, commonly known as "framing," are related to viewer preferences on matters of public policy. In this report, we tested the impact of three different news frames on attitudes about childcare. Each frame represented a different view. The first frame set the childcare issue as a matter of early childhood development. The second frame argued for employer responsibility. The third frame represented government regulation of childcare services. Using a novel experimental method, researchers were able to assess the relative strength of each news frame on viewers' attitudes about childcare.

One basic finding emerged from the analysis: **how the issue of childcare is framed has a significant impact on viewers' preferences**. Several pieces of data support this claim. A simple comparison of means between the control group and the average of the three experimental conditions, for instance, showed that in only a few instances did seeing any news story about childcare significantly alter attitudes. Exposure to early childhood development primed attitudes about the role of the family; watching the story about employer participation increased support for employer responsibility; and seeing the segment about government regulation lead viewer's to see an expanded role for government.

A second major finding was that: **exposure to the employer responsibility frame had the largest impact on viewer attitudes**. This frame had robust effects on attitudes about the role of employers. Less anticipated, however, was the finding that this frame also had a significant impact on attitudes about the saliency of childcare (and the saliency of crime) and levels of government spending for children's programs.

These findings should be taken as preliminary rather than conclusive. The failure of the other two frames to perform as consistently as employer responsibility may be a function of a few factors. In the first instance, the employer responsibility story was extremely clear and coherent. The other two stories, however, were a little more ambiguous. The story about early childhood development was an especially weak treatment. Although the story line

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makes clear mention of the importance of the early years, it is easy to imagine a better treatment such as interviews with researchers working on early development and sidebars with child psychologists and teachers. The same might be said about the government regulation frame. While the story briefly showed a state inspector and mentioned questions of government licensing, a better treatment might feature interviews with government officials responsible for enforcing guidelines, childcare advocates seeking changes in policy, and parents stating their desire for better regulation. Given this, researchers were pleased that the latter stories actually produced changes in attitudes given their relatively weak production values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Get your story out. Mayhem and violence, to be sure, dominate the local television news market. Stories about other relevant public issues, therefore, are often "crowded out." To gain any traction with the public requires an alternative to the "bad seed" paradigm most prominent in local news. To this end, it is important that childcare advocates develop contacts with assignment editors, producers, and reporters. Advocates should maintain relationships with the media, even when there is not a specific story or event to "sell".

(2) Pay attention to how your story is framed. The lesson from our study is that framing matters. Develop frames that accent the major elements of your proposal, program, or policy. Blanket stories are not nearly as effective as ones that take special care to clearly delineate the problems and solutions.

(3) Create, produce, and test your own news frames. One important means to find the proper elements for your story is to make and test pilot news stories that feature the central message you wish to convey. While the standard is to conduct focus groups, consideration of an experimental method should be given that allows for much tighter comparative analysis.

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FRAME #1:
Early Childhood Development

Video: Two anchors at desk—one male, one female.

Male anchor: "The message is loud and clear—children are falling through the cracks."

Video: Split screen. Reporter on site.
Graphic: "Top Story". "Children in Trouble"

Male Anchor: "Larry Miller is at the Boys and Girls club, just one place offering solutions in these hard times. Larry?"

Video: On site—a mother and a father playing with a toddler, other adults are supervising children.

Reporter (voice-over): "Debbie Soufer says she and her husband are fortunate. They have two incomes, and their day care is subsidized. But as a part-time middle school teacher, she sees many students whose problems can be traced to inadequate or non-existent child-care."

Video: Debbie is playing with a toddler

Debbie (voice-over): "We talk about needing to put money into education and I think that these are the most important years, you know, for kids. You know, I wish that we made this more of a priority as a society, and we don't."

Video: The toddler is playing.

Reporter (voice-over): "But those priorities may yet change, with more people entering the work force, and childcare costs continuing to rise."

FRAME # 2
Employer Responsibility

Video: Split screen—anchor on left; graphic on right "Solutions".

Anchor: "Lots of parents are finding it hard to afford quality day care. People at one company think they may have a solution, though, and April Zepeda joins us tonight live at Kids' Hutch Center."

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Video: Pan out to two anchors at desk, reporter on screen in back left.

First Anchor: "April, what's so different about this, uh, child care center?"

Video: Reporter on site.

Reporter: "Well all the kids that you see at this center..."

Video: Cut to mother, father, and child playing on site. Cut to scene of children interacting with other children and the day care provider.

Reporter (voice-over)..."are kids of employees who work for Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. During the day they get to play on the computer. They get to do activities like science projects. You see, what this company is trying to do is make it a whole lot easier for parents to have affordable, quality day care. Fortunately for parents employed by Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, there's help. The company pays the building costs, rent, and utilities of this day care center."

Video: Cut back to reporter on site.

Reporter: "And in all of this, Fred Hutchinson benefits too because studies show that employees miss fewer days of work, and they're more productive on the job because they're not worrying about their kids."

FRAME # 3
Government Regulation

Video: Anchor at desk, graphic: "News 4 Special Report", "Day Care"

Anchor: "We've all heard the horror stories—stories about centers operating without a license, and in one disturbing and unusual case, a two-year-old left alone in a center that was locked-up for the night. We set out to find out how day care centers are licensed, and we went along with an inspector to find out what to look for."

Video: Day care inspector on site; fade to graphic of checklist.

Anchor (voice-over): "Inspector Martha Pauley says parents should note whether the facility is 'clean,' 'well staffed,' has 'first aid' equipment, and a first aid-trained worker. Note how the staff "communicates" with your child. Look for a prominently posted license or permit along, with the last 'inspection report.' And look for 'visible signs of safety.'

Video: Cut back to anchor at desk.

Anchor: "You should use that checklist. Also shop around and make unannounced visits before you choose. Your local social services agency can refer you to licensed facilities in your area."

The sample consisted of residents of Los Angeles who were recruited through flyers offering $15 for participation in "media research." Fifty-three percent of the subjects were white, 16 percent were African-American, 12 percent were Hispanic, and 13 percent were Asian. In keeping with the area, 42 percent were Democrats and 49 percent considered themselves liberal. Fifty-three percent were women and 47 percent were men.

[1] In this study all childcare news segments are thematic. It is generally believed that thematic news frames lead viewers to the belief that the causes of and solutions to social problems are collective rather than the responsibility of individuals.

[2] A transcription of the three news frames on childcare is found beginning on page 73.

[3] Analysis of variance was the primary statistical test.

[4] In virtually every instance, in which the mean of a particular condition was significantly different, it was also significantly different from the mean of the control condition.

[5] The analysis was performed for the entire sample. Random assignment ensured that factors such as race and gender were randomly distributed across the experimental conditions. Nonetheless, we performed the analysis with demographic controls and the results were unchanged.

[6] The question reads:
"Who do you think should be primarily responsible for ensuring that families have access to childcare?"

[7] The questions read:
"People have different opinions about childcare. For a child (under 3 years of age/3-5 years of age), which of the following childcare options would be most important to you. Please rank the three options in order of importance?"
"Would you be willing to pay $100 more in taxes to ensure that all working families in your community were able to afford the kind of care you ranked as most important?"

[8] At a descriptive level a couple of points are noteworthy. In reference to children under the age of three, "flexible employers" is the highest ranked option. For children between three and five, trained teachers is the preferred option. In both cases, about two-thirds of the subjects said they would pay a tax increase for the option they ranked most important. These differences, however, have little direct bearing on the impact of childcare news frames.

[9] The question reads:
"Next, we are going to list several actions the federal government might take to strengthen families and family values. For each one, please tell us whether you think it will be extremely effective, very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all."

[10] The question reads:
"Here are some areas of government spending. Please indicate whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say "much more," it might require a tax increase to pay for it.
1. Health care for children whose families don't have insurance
2. Preschool programs like Head Start for poor children
3. Housing for poor families with children
4. Nutrition programs for poor children and families, such as food stamps and school lunches

[11] The question reads:
"Now we would like to ask you some questions about the role of women. Lately there has been a lot of talk about working mothers. Please indicate your opinion by circling the appropriate number (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree).
A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.
It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself.
A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.
It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.

Items 2-4 were reflected such that a progressive response is scored as high.

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LANGUAGE FOR REDUCING VIOLENCE

by Axel Aubrun, Ph.D. and Joseph E. Grady, Ph.D.

SECTION I—INTRODUCTION

Focusing on the individual vs. focusing on the community

This report recommends a variety of framings and metaphors for communicating important messages about violence in American communities. The guiding principles behind all these messages are that violence can be reduced, and that the most effective way to do so is to improve social and economic conditions in the community.

We begin with a basic cultural observation about how Americans understand violence—briefly put, Americans toggle back and forth between two points of view, which correspond to two sets of concerns about violence. The first focuses on the genesis of violent behavior in individuals: Why are particular individuals prone to violent behavior, how did they get that way, and what if anything can be done to prevent others from becoming perpetrators of violence? The second emphasizes the threat of violence to the community - What practical steps can a community take to protect itself, and to reduce the threat of violence?

These two sets of concerns are related but distinct (and often mutually exclusive), and both must be addressed by any serious program to communicate about violence. A program that only focuses on preventing children from growing up to be violent, for instance, can be accused of ignoring the real and immediate threat that is already out there.

Countering the myths of violence

Communicating a violence prevention message means confronting a number of counterproductive attitudes about violence, which also happen to run counter to the prevailing scientific understandings of the problem. For instance, the myth that violent acts are only committed by people who are essentially evil implies that jobs and education in the community are basically irrelevant to the problem of violence. This myth must be replaced by the more accurate generalization that, in certain circumstances, everyone is capable of engaging in violent behavior. On the community level, a critical problem is the attitude that a community's best defense against violence is greater "firepower," including more prisons and more forceful police action. The generalization that must replace this myth is that the key to real, lasting violence reduction is strengthening the structure of the community, in part by improving access to jobs and education and in part by taking a number of small steps that encourage people to feel that they have a stake in the community.

Here are the main myths that the framings and metaphors below are intended to counteract (for more detail, see Grady & Aubrun 1998 "Models of Violence Prevention"). The first four in some ways seem to contradict the second four, but both sets are equally potent and equally problematic:

1. Violent reprisals effectively discourage violent behavior.
2. Communities can best protect themselves from violence by using greater force / "fighting fire with fire."

3. Communities must protect themselves by identifying bad people and isolating/eliminating them.
4. Violent people are violent because they are bad by nature.
5. Violence is manly, a sign of strength and control.
6. Violence is a natural and necessary way of preserving discipline and order.
7. The urge towards violence is integral to (male) human nature.
8. If violent feelings are channeled into "safe" activities like watching violent movies, they cease to be a threat.

While it is not realistic to expect that these well-entrenched folk models will quickly be replaced by more constructive understandings of violence, it is important to take the myths into account, undermine them whenever possible, and take care that the suggested language and frames do not evoke the myths.

Positive alternative messages

The frames and metaphors presented in this report are ways of expressing a number of general points, which are both more constructive than the myths listed above, and conform more closely to scientific evidence:

- Violence is learned by example.
- "Moral violence" (including corporal punishment, the use of police force, etc.) is still violence, and therefore it teaches violence.
- "Moral violence" treats symptoms rather than causes.
- Stress of all kinds promotes violence.
- Violence is a symptom of individual weakness and of community weakness; the most effective way of dealing with it is by dealing with the causes.
- Violence is opportunistic—"if the soul is weak, the devil comes in"— and if the community is weak, the violence comes in.
- Violence is a breakdown in the social system.
- Violence is an aspect of a particular culture (not a natural, inevitable way of behaving).
- Violence is reducible, not eradicable.

SECTION 2—DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AS A TREAT TO THE COMMUNITY

Framings and metaphors that emphasize jobs and education rather than police and prisons

Violence as a disease that strikes the community

A community is like a body that must be kept strong and healthy if it is to resist disease. Violent crime is one of the diseases that can strike a community when it lacks adequate employment, education, and social bonds.

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Violence as a weed (that takes root in the community)

A community is like a garden that must be well tended in order to thrive. Violent crime is like an opportunistic weed that takes root when the community is not looked after.

Violence as decay of a community

A community is like a house that must be well maintained in order to remain sturdy and sound. Violent crime is like the deterioration and decay that sets in when the community lacks adequate employment, education, and social bonds.

Jobs and education as preventive medicine

Medical prevention is usually cheaper and more effective than medical treatments after you are sick; likewise violence prevention is cheaper and more effective than police and prisons.

Police and prisons as community painkillers

Violent crime is a symptom of other social problems. Police and prisons never cure the problem—they are like giving powerful painkillers to someone with a broken leg. They help in the short run, but they can't solve the problem.

Violence as storm damage

If a community is a house, then education and social bonds are like sturdy construction and weatherproofing that protect the community in changing conditions. If communities are well prepared, with strong leadership and adequate resources, they are better able to weather "storms" (like factory closures or reductions in benefits spending) and avoid rises in violent crime.

Violence as a tear in the fabric of the community

A community is like a fabric woven from many individuals. The more tightly knit the community, the less likely it is to be victimized by violent crime. Violent crime increases when the community "unravels" because of inadequate opportunities, resources, and a failure to maintain social bonds.

Supporting other communities is a smart investment.

The fate of safe, affluent communities (and the people in them) is linked to the fate of other communities around them. First because violent criminals don't restrict all their activity to their own neighborhoods. And second, because the less affluent communities provide customers and workers that make the economies of more affluent communities possible.

By supporting the conditions that make nearby communities free from violence, you are doing your own community a favor. Jobs and education for disadvantaged communities help keep your own community safer and more prosperous.

Framings and metaphors that emphasize the importance of social bonds within the community

Violent crime is shy.

Research shows that the more time that members of the community spend in public space, such as their own porches, the less violent crime there is in the community. Violent street crime drops when ordinary citizens "take back their streets" even in simple, non-confrontational ways.

Violent crime loves a vacuum.

Violence takes advantage of the absence of positive activities in a community. When people in the community make themselves present, violence is less likely to move in.

Keeping a neighborhood safe is a community project.

Reducing violence in a community requires an ongoing commitment of time and energy. Each member contributes a little at a time (by making time to talk to each other, get to know each other, getting involved in a neighborhood project, etc.).

Kids' public misbehavior is everyone's business.

Studies show that violent crime is lower when adults in a community don't hesitate to correct the behavior of their neighbors' kids. As one member of a focus group put it, "everybody in my neighborhood had the authority to whup me."

Small acts of disrespect are the seeds of violence.

When small acts that defy community standards are ignored and tolerated - e.g. giving someone the finger or breaking a window in an empty building - the community is weakened and violence is more likely to take root.

Reduce crime, talk to a neighbor.

The better neighbors know each other, and the tighter the bonds within the community, the less violence there is. This means that even simple, pleasant activities like chatting with a neighbor help reduce violent crime.

"Connectivity" as violence prevention

The more connections there are between people in a community (i.e. the tighter the network) the less violence there is.

Inclusion as violence prevention

Communities succeed better by drawing people into the circle rather than by driving them out. The better job the community does at making all of its members feel like they belong, the less violence there is in the community.

The more people know and communicate about what happens in their neighborhood, the more control they can gain over violent crime in their community. Like mold, violence thrives and multiplies in conditions where it's unseen.

This is just as true for domestic crime as for street crime. When violence isn't reported it goes unchecked.

SECTION 3—DEALING WITH THE GENESIS OF VIOLENCE IN THE INDIVIDUAL

Violence as an addictive drug

Experts on human behavior see many parallels between violence and an addictive drug. There are several ways in which behaving violently feels like taking a drug, and even has similar effects on your nervous system, both short-term (pleasure, stimulation, etc.) and long-term (toxicity, dependence). In addition, the addiction metaphor emphasizes the importance of both external and internal factors in the development of violent behavior (e.g., the prevalence of violence in the environment, and individual responsibility for self-control).

Violence can be tempting.

Violence is both exciting to watch and a tempting response to some situations. It takes willpower and vigilance to avoid the temptation.

Violence can be habit forming.

Once you have experienced it, you are more likely to engage in violence again in the future.

Violence can be pleasurable.

Even violence that is "moral," such as police force or corporal punishment, often results in a "rush" for the aggressor. This is the same sort of rush we often get when watching violent movies or violent sports.

Violence can be hypnotic.

The spectacle of violence, whether real or fictional, tends to push out other thoughts and priorities. It is hard to stop, look away, or think about other things when violence is present.

Violence clouds our judgment.

People exposed to or engaged in violence enter a psychologically-altered state which makes rational thinking more difficult.

Violence as a product that is marketed.

The entertaining aspect of violence is exploited by the media, sports industry, military recruiters, etc. Violence, like various illicit drugs, is "pushed" to the public, especially to young males.

Everyone is susceptible to being violent, not just "bad" people.

Like a powerful drug, violence can "hook" anyone, given the right timing and circumstances. Even people we are used to thinking of as "good" can fall into the habit.

Violence as a habit that can be broken.

As in the case of drug addiction, people who are engaged in violent behavior can often recover and change their behavior.

Violence as a toxin

Both victims and perpetrators of violence often show serious long-term psychological effects that can last for years, e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder.

Violence as learned behavior

People, especially as children, learn how to live and how to behave mostly by imitating what they see around them. All forms of violence, including "moral violence" (corporal punishment, the use of force by police, etc.), and "entertainment violence," teach the lesson that violence is an appropriate way of solving problems. Anyone who grows up in a violent environment is more likely to become violent in his/her own life.

The culture of violence

America is a very violent society by most objective measures. American kids are exposed to more violent imagery in the media, are more likely to see guns in the home, are more likely to witness violence in their neighborhoods than kids in other countries. This means that they are more likely to accept violence, which is woven into the fabric of life around them.

Violence can be seductive

It takes willpower to resist the allure of violence. Violence is sexy.

Violence as a role model

People, and especially kids, tend to admire and imitate those who dominate others. They see violent people as "cool" and "glamorous." They want to be like them in order to have more control themselves.

Violence as a sign of status and belonging

Like grafitti, slang, and fashion, violence is a behavior that people engage in to show that they are part of a group.

Violence as a move in a game

Given the "right" conditions violence is a natural, strategic, response. Part of reducing violent crime is changing conditions so that violent crime stops seeming like the right choice.

Violence as a wrong turn

Violence is one path people can choose in life. Given weak communities, lack of opportunity, and an environment that teaches violence, it is inevitable that many kids will at some point choose this path. It is usually possible to turn them back and get them on a different path.

Violence will play you

Violence is a crafty manipulator who will trick you into self-destructive behavior. Though violence can make you feel strong, you are really not in control of your life when you engage in violence.

Violence as weakness

Staying nonviolent takes effort and determination, just like staying in shape. The stronger you are inside, the less likely it is you will engage in violence.

"Fighting fire with gasoline"

Because violence is learned through exposure, force should not be society's main response to violence. As a general solution, using force to fight violence is like using gasoline to fight fire. It promotes the culture of violence, teaching people, especially kids, that this is a world in which the strongest and most aggressive people make the rules.

Violence as a sickness

Even good people sometimes succumb to violent behavior. Often it is possible to heal them and rid them of this sickness.

Violence as infectious illness

Everyone is susceptible to catching the illness of violence. When people are exposed to violence they tend to become violent themselves.

Violence is sad

Rather than being noble and glamorous, violence is tragic.

Violence has consequences

Violence takes just a moment, but its effects are often profound and long lasting.

SECTION 4—RESPONDING TO SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

There are certain objections to the ideas of violence prevention that will inevitably be encountered. Here are some suggestions about countering those objections.

We've got crime in our neighborhood *now*. The only *immediate* solution is more police.

Police are definitely needed to respond to violent situations, and it's comforting to know that they are available when trouble does happen. The real goal, though, should be to try to "get ahead of the curve" on violence, rather than forever playing catch-up.

SEE: **Jobs and education as preventive medicine, Police and prisons as community painkillers, "Fighting fire with gasoline"**

Some people are going to be violent no matter what you do.

It will never be possible to eliminate all violence. Some people do have psychological problems or moral failings that society can't address except through the judicial system. But it is not accurate to say that the violence in our society is contained within "some people," or that eliminating those people will take care of the problem of violence.

SEE: **Violence as an addictive drug, Violence as learned behavior, Violence as a weed, Violence as decay**

Plenty of people are poor or disadvantaged or come from broken homes, and don't become violent. Those are just excuses.

And plenty of people who smoke don't get emphysema yet most of us wouldn't take that chance and encourage our kids to smoke. The point is that certain conditions make it much more likely that individuals and communities will become violent. We should therefore do everything we can to reduce that likelihood.

SEE: **Violence as an addictive drug, Violence as learned behavior, Violence as a weed, Violence as decay**

This sounds like liberal nonsense.

The point here isn't politics, it's just common sense backed by scientific evidence. There is a huge amount of research showing that the conditions people live in and grow up in have a major impact on how they live their lives. So it makes sense to try to do everything to increase the odds that a community will be peaceful, prosperous and law-abiding.

By the way, partners in this program include organizations at all levels of law enforcement, that believe it will reduce violent crime and make their job easier and safer.

What about individual morality?

Individuals choose whether or not to commit violent acts, and they are responsible for those choices. Individual morality is a critical factor, but it doesn't operate in a vacuum. Parents and communities must take responsibility for others, for example, working to reduce the exposure of young people to violence, and strengthening the social bonds that keep violence from taking hold of a community.

SEE: **Violence as an addictive drug, Violence as learned behavior**

Isn't "permissiveness," on the part of both parents and society, the real cause of violence?

Not if permissiveness means the absence of punishment. Punishment is always a small part of the solution to the problem of violence, and is often part of the problem itself. Focusing only on punishment, and allowing ourselves to give up on the many small solutions that can significantly reduce violence in daily life, amounts to a moral laziness that we cannot afford, either as parents or as a society.

SEE: **Violence as learned behavior, Violence as a role model**

Violence isn't a problem in my community or among people like me.

Violence is part of American culture. People of all ethnicities and socioeconomic classes are affected by violence.

SEE: **The culture of violence, Violence as a learned behavior, Supporting other communities is a smart investment**

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